



# THE INDEPENDENT

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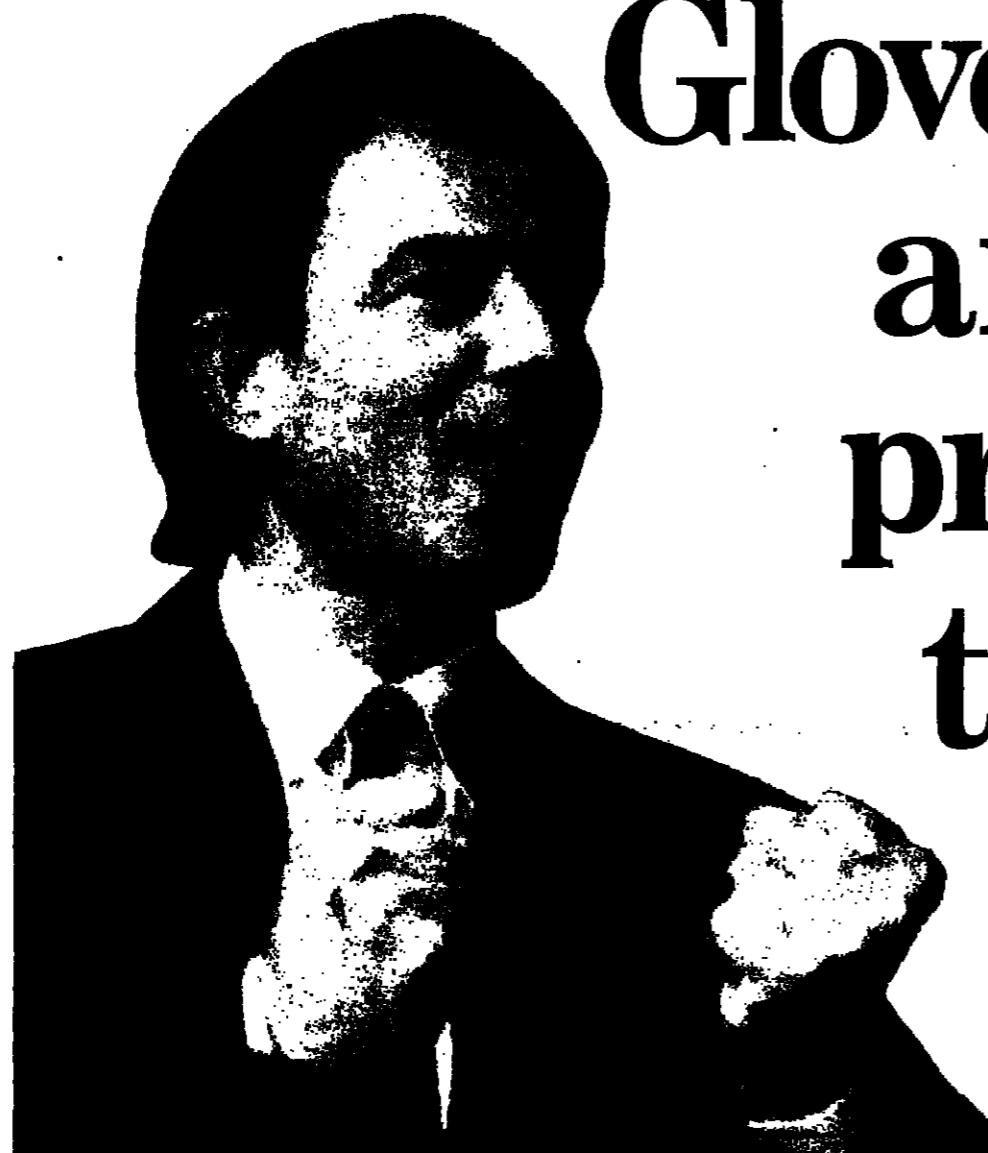
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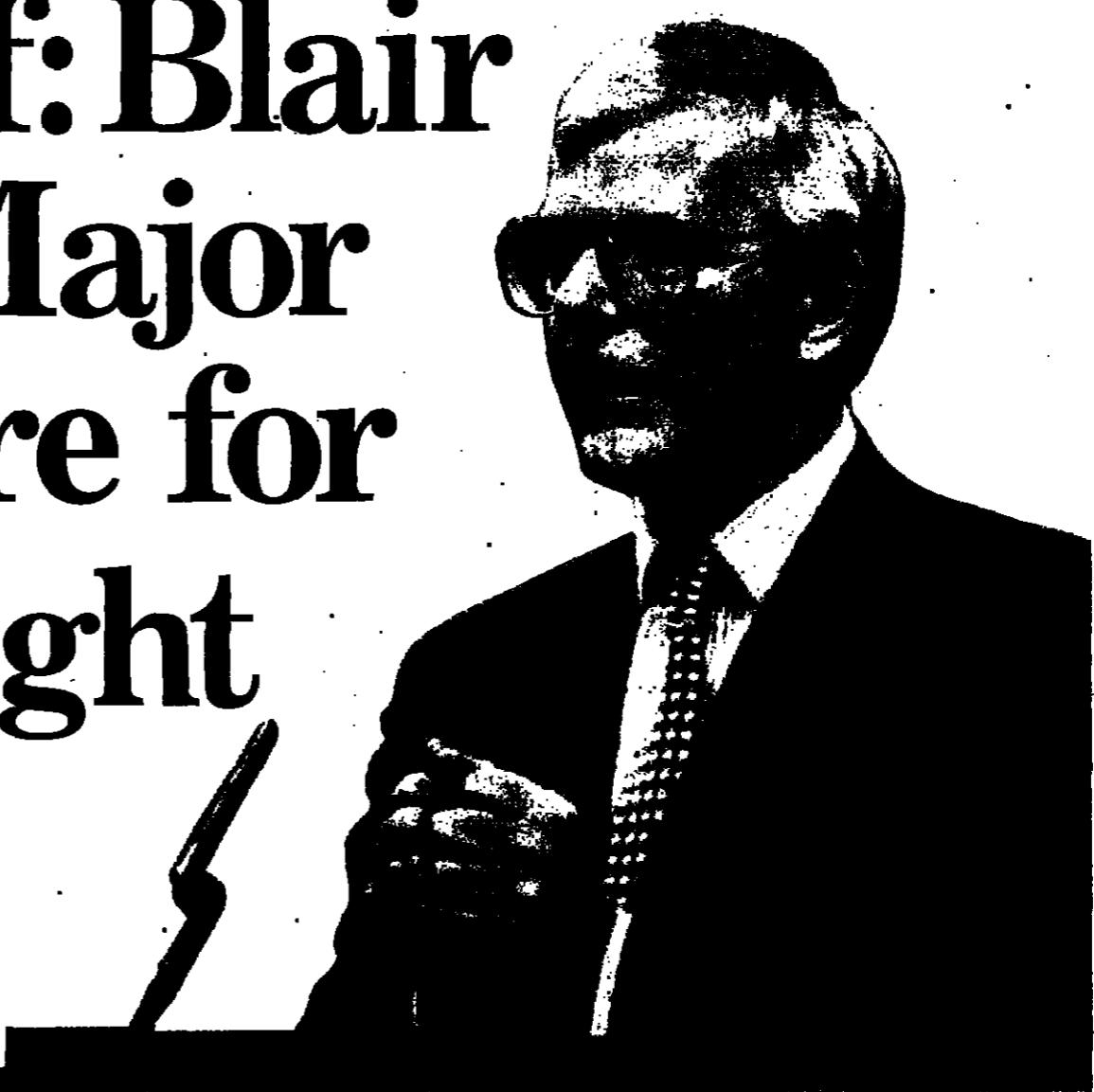
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Interview:  
Fran Cotton, hard  
man of rugby



# Gloves off: Blair and Major prepare for the fight



Anthony Bevins  
and Colin Brown

That is nerve of the most grotesque sort, to claim they are the party to heal the fractured society, when they have spent 18 years creating it.

Tony Blair

Tony Blair yesterday attacked the "grotesque nerve" of John Major as expectations ran high that the Prime Minister will go to the Palace within the next 48 hours to ask the Queen for a dissolution of Parliament, at last triggering the election for 1 May.

With gloves off for a six-week campaign that could see the first televised leadership debate, Mr Blair, in an interview with the *Independent*, accused the Tories of doing a somersault on the need to help the country's have-nots.

Ministers were braced for a call today to Downing Street that would end the "phoney war" and begin one of the longest campaigns of the post-war period in an attempt to

close the record Labour lead over the Tories. "I have not had the call yet but it looks as though we are on the way," said one Cabinet minister.

Mr Major's attempts to regain the initiative by accepting Mr Blair's challenge of televised debates, after a lack-lustre conference in Bath and the launch of the Tory election slogan - "You can be sure of the Conservatives" - became bogged down in a dispute over terms for the debate.

Mr Blair said Mr Major was still "mucking around" by refusing to allow Paddy Ashdown to join in. A Blair aide said the Tories were engaged in a scam to make sure a debate did not take place by imposing impossible conditions.

Mr Blair also told the *Independent* it was "ridiculous" for

the Conservatives to blame

Labour councils for the failings of Conservative government; that Baroness Thatcher was right to say he was a British patriot who would defend the national interest in Europe; and that the Tories believed they had a divine right to rule.

"They have a sort of sense of outrage and anger that the Labour Party has finally got its act together and offers a credible alternative. They think it's very impudent of us."

But his toughest attack was in response to Mr Major's cam-

aign theme, delivered to the Conservative Central Council in Bath on Saturday, that the Conservatives should now turn their attention to helping society's have-nots. Mr Major said: "We are out to make sure that those who don't have, do have. That revolution began years ago. Now it is time to move it into a new phase."

Mr Blair said: "That is nerve of the most grotesque sort, to claim that they are the party to heal the fractured society, when they have spent 18 years creating it - and a large part of that

time saying there's no such thing as society at all.

"They are doing it because people believe the Conservatives increasingly represent the few, not the many, and therefore they are desperate to try and salvage some of their credibility on this question. But I think people will say 'Who is best after 18 years in office to heal the divisions of our society - the people who created them or those that have been drawing attention to them?'" As to

yet another reported endorsement for Mr Blair from Lady

Thatcher, with one of her confidants saying she believed Mr

Blair was a British patriot who

would defend British interests in Europe, the Labour leader

said: "I hope that is true. I am a British patriot and I believe

that Britain is entirely safe in our

hands. But what is important in our attitude to Europe is that our attitude to Europe is driven by our genuine national interest, and not by internal party bickering, which is what has happened with the Conservatives."

Although government sources refused to confirm Mr Major will go to the Palace today, a member of Labour's campaign said: "Major wants to have his day - he needs the

flimmetry."

There was more woe for Mr Major as right-wing West Midlands MPs ignored pleas for unity by Michael Portillo, a right-wing champion in the Cabinet, by calling for the Tories to raise immigration in the campaign and to oppose entry into a single European currency.

We are out to make sure that those who don't have, do have. That revolution began years ago. Now it is time to move it into a new phase.

John Major

## Election winner faces spending time bomb

Diane Coyle  
Economics Editor

The next government is almost certain to miss its public spending targets because of runaway growth in the health and social security budgets, according to new research published today.

A paper by a Treasury adviser suggests it will be extremely difficult to stick to the spending plans set by Kenneth Clarke in the last Budget, to which both the Labour Party and the Conservatives are committed.

It was only the lower-than-expected inflation during the recession that allowed the Government to hit its cash spending targets, so the latest plans could

turn out to be a time-bomb for a new Labour government. If Labour wins on 1 May, Gordon Brown's first budget is expected to be on 1 July.

The findings show that government expenditure since the last election has grown unusually fast, given the state of the economy.

The paper, by Nigel Pain, Treasury "wise person" Martin Weale and Garry Young, of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, comments: "Perhaps the most curious aspect of the period is that the Government has managed to create an impression of tight control of expenditure since 1992."

It was only the lower-than-expected inflation during the recession that allowed the Government to hit its cash spending targets, so the latest plans could

Other independent experts agree with the pessimistic National Institute analysis. Andrew Dilnot, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said: "Whoever is in power, whatever happens, these spending plans will be a real bust-up."

"If they are met, there will be dramatic cuts in public services. If they are not met, the public finances will be in severely bad shape. Either way, the consequences are stark."

Mr Dilnot said it would not be impossible to hit the targets, but he thought politicians had no idea of the consequences this would have for public services. It would mean savage cuts in areas such as non-acute health

care and higher education, he predicted.

Officials privately concede that government expenditure has grown rapidly in real terms since 1992 and describe the current plans as "ambitious". The targets Mr Clarke set out in the Budget allow for real expenditure growth of only 0.3 percent in 1997/98 and 0.4 percent in 1998/99, compared with a five-year average of just over 3 percent a year. Mr Weale said yesterday: "We don't think the social security and health budgets are running out of control."

Health and three components of social security - housing benefit, disability allowances

and income support - have expanded far faster than normal, given the state of the economy. Spending on health and social security amounted to more than £142bn, or nearly half of the total in 1995/96, the last full financial year for which figures are available.

The authors say that after the last election "expenditure rose by more than can be accounted for by a normal response to the recession and has remained high now the recession is over".

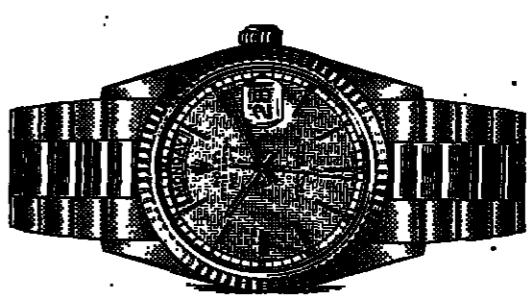
It is the high levels of government spending since the last election that have left the Treasury's forecasts, because they are not as optimistic about growth prospects.

they ought to be at this stage of the economic recovery. The "black hole" is due mainly to rapid growth in health and social security spending in inflation-adjusted terms.

The authors calculate that tax revenues have been much as expected, contrary to the popular myth that there has been a shortfall in taxes in recent years. The variations in receipts from year to year have been "well within the normal error margins".

However, they do predict that revenues during the next three years will fall below the Treasury's forecasts, because they are not as optimistic about growth prospects.

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Not, we might add, from the Food Hall.

### Hussein's plea

King Hussein of Jordan yesterday visited the families of seven teenage Israeli girls murdered by a Jordanian soldier last week. He also made a last minute effort to dissuade Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, from building a controversial Jewish settlement at Har Homa in Jerusalem. David Levy, the Foreign Minister, said: "The government's decisions stands and will be executed."

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### QUICKLY

**Albania's mourning**  
Four people, including two children, were hurt when Albanian police fired above a crowd surging towards the ferry landing site at Durres yesterday in a national day of mourning for the dozens who have died and hundreds injured in recent violence. Page 9

**Lottery cash plans**  
National Lottery funds totalling £300m a year will be invested in high-tech computers for schools, libraries and village communities under plans to be announced today by Virginia Bottomley, the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Page 5

## Miami takes shine to Mr Goldfinger

Phil Davison  
Miami

Babani Sissoko has Miami's people confused. Even the local Cuban-American, Brazilian and Russian gangs don't flash the kind of tips he does. He gave his maceuse a gold watch and £6,000 in cash.

Babani, as everyone calls him here, is from West Africa and in his forties - but he doesn't specify much. Nor do his three lawyers. They seem happy enough with the £40,000 Mercedes-Benz sports cars he gave them last week as gifts.

Miami authorities are niggled by the question: is Babani really a Robin Hood? Or just a hood? Where, they ask, did he get the kind of money that allows him to hand over an £8,000 gold ington a tip to a band of musicians he hired at short notice?

Mr Sissoko says he made his fortune by stashing "take-home" gold nuggets he was given as a young worker in Liberia's gold mines. United States customs authorities believe his true gold mine is shipping American weapons, including helicopters, to the highest bidders in Africa.

They have a point. He is about to go to jail, for 45 days.

for offering £20,000 to a US customs agent to turn a blind eye to two military-style Bell helicopters he wanted to ship to Africa.

In an interview with the *Miami Herald*, Mr Sissoko said he was born to a poor, illiterate family in Mali.

He stowed away on a ship to China where he made his first money in commissions from an agent who charged people just to look at him because they had never seen a black man before. Later, Mr Sissoko made a pilgrimage to a guru in Bombay in India, but when he asked him the meaning of life, the guru died. So Mr Sissoko made the logical choice and came to Miami.

At a local car dealership the other day, he overheard a Miami woman negotiating the price of a Range Rover. He walked over and insisted the dealer put the vehicle on his bill. "I was sent by God," he told the woman and the dealer. The woman was speechless. The dealer took the cheque.

Then he gave £20,000 to a Miami high school marching band so they can play at an upcoming parade in New York. "I know it sounds strange, but he says giving away money just makes him happy," explained one of his lawyers.

### THE BROADSHEET

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## news

## significant shorts

## Norris backtracks over Newbury bypass

Steve Norris, the former transport minister, today gives his backing to anti-roads protesters and admits the countryside devastated by the Newbury bypass could have been left alone.

Britain should no longer "pander to infinite traffic growth", Mr Norris says in a BBC *Panorama* inquiry on gridlock on the roads to be broadcast tonight.

Mr Norris, a former car salesman, is leaving Parliament this election to become director general of the Road Haulage Association. He was transport minister during the eviction at Newbury, but has been widely acknowledged as having toned down the Government's roads-obsessed transport policy.

Admitting that the wrong route was chosen for the controversial Newbury bypass in Berkshire, Mr Norris told *Panorama*: "I believe we could have left all this countryside alone... I don't think this route should have been used."

Louise Jury

## Clampdown on road tax dodgers

Motorists face the prospect of having their vehicles clamped and even crushed in a nationwide crackdown on road tax dodgers.

The scheme, due to be unveiled tomorrow by Sir George Young, the Secretary of State for Transport, was piloted in five London boroughs and recovered £2m in unpaid tax.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, based in Wales, estimates there are 1.6 million tax cheats costing the country £175m in lost revenue every year.

Under the plans, private contractors check vehicles not displaying a disc with the DVLA. If there is no record of a current licence, the vehicles will be clamped. They will be impounded if not taxed within 24 hours, and the owner will have five weeks to pay a release fee of £65 or face losing their vehicle. Any cars not reclaimed will be sold or scrapped.

## 'Double' alleged to serve sentence

Scotland Yard is investigating claims that rap star Mark Morrison has been using a double to complete a community service order.

It was reported at the weekend that the Leicester-born singer persuaded a close friend to carry out the work at a hostel for the homeless in West London.

The order was originally imposed by a judge at Leicester Crown Court after 24-year-old Morrison was convicted of violent conduct following a fracas outside a nightclub in 1994 during which a man died. Morrison appeared before a judge at Leicester Crown Court last October over non-completion of the sentence when he was fined after his lawyer blamed the pressures of fame.

## Caroline's father calls for DNA tests

The father of 13-year-old schoolgirl Caroline Dickinson who was raped and murdered on a trip to France is pressing investigators to carry out DNA testing of men near the town where she died.

John Dickinson's daughter died in a hostel in Plene Fougeres, Brittany, during a school trip in July last year. Mr Dickinson, 41, of Bodmin, Cornwall, who visited the village for a fourth time this weekend, said on BBC Radio 4's *The World This Weekend* yesterday that he went "to keep the pressure on".

"The murderer must be found without fail and as soon as possible before he takes another life."

## Vicar ready for prison over Blake

A Church of England priest last night said he was ready to go to prison over his role in the prison escape of double agent George Blake. The Rev John Pawpworth's defiant stand came as police prepared to probe his role in Blake's flight to freedom more than 30 years ago.

Mr Pawpworth, 75, of St John's Wood, north London, hit the headlines on Friday with his description of shoplifting as "a badly needed reallocation of economic resources".

Yesterday he confirmed he had housed Blake for two or three days in Earls Court, west London, after the spy's escape from prison in October 1966. He said if police came to interview him about it: "I will give them a cup of tea and help them as much as I can."

## Eurostar makes longest journey

The longest train journey ever made from a British station was completed yesterday when Eurostar ran a direct service from central London to the French Alps for the first time.

The 722-mile trial voyage from Waterloo to Bourg St Maurice took eight hours. The trip was a precursor to public services which are scheduled to begin at the start of this winter's ski season in December. Previously the longest non-stop train journey made from a station in Britain was the daily 684-mile Aberdeen to Plymouth service.

## Alcohol helpline for children

A national alcohol helpline for schoolchildren was launched yesterday. Drinkline Youth is aimed at children and teenagers who need help or information about their own drinking, that of their parents or of their friends.

"The rise of alcohol and the targeting of young people by drink companies have increased the dangers," said Wendy Robinson, the youthline manager.

The helpline has been funded by the National Charities' Lotteries Board and set up by Drinkline - the national alcohol helpline. Counsellors will be available between 11am and 11pm five days a week. Some 20 per cent of boys and eight per cent of girls aged 15-16 are drinking more than the recommended adult limits.

## Six share lottery jackpot

Six ticket-holders will split this week's £9m National Lottery, each winning £1.5m. The winning numbers drawn were 43, 39, 37, 34, 7, 40 and the bonus ball was 15.

## THE INDEPENDENT ABROAD

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BACK COPIES: £1. The *Independent* is £1.40. Postage: £1.50.  
Recycled paper made up 41.2% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1996.

A barber who has been cutting the hair of prime ministers, archbishops and all who work in the Palace of Westminster for a quarter of a century, may be in danger of losing his job, MPs fear. More than 100 parliamentarians, political journalists and others have signed a petition to save the job of Stephen Silverne, 58, who has become an institution at Westminster. Mr Silverne declined to comment on his position, but MPs fear he is in jeopardy because of plans to introduce a "unisex" salon in the Commons. Leading the campaign to keep him in his job is Denis MacShane, Labour MP for Rotherham, who said: "Paris couturiers would die to have the sharp post-classical haircut service Mr Silverne provides. He should be given a peerage, not the sack."

He was backed by David Young, Labour MP for Bolton South-East, who said: "I do not think it is right for a Labour or any other government to get rid of people who have served the House so well for so many years." Mr Young said he would not himself patronise a unisex salon. "I feel strongly that as more ladies come into the Commons they should have the right to have their own hairdresser. But there are male rights, too, for those who do not want a unisex salon." When Mr Silverne arrived in 1970, there still existed the barber's chair in which Gladstone sat. But now his salon has been thoroughly modernised. Some women have used his services, including Virginia Bottomley, before she became a minister, and Labour MPs Harriet Harman and Ann Chwyd.

## people



Penny Houghton: Sent home twice as teachers work to rule (Photograph: Will Lack)

## Eight-year-old at the centre of legal battle over teaching

Eight-year-old Penny Houghton has been sent home from school twice in the past two weeks because of a dispute over class sizes at her West Yorkshire primary school.

She is one of at least 30 children missing class one day a week because of a National Union of Teachers' work-to-rule at Feamrey Lee Infant and Junior school in Calderdale, West Yorkshire.

Now her parents are taking legal action against Calderdale Council to stop the disruption to her education. Her father, Darren, said his daughter had become a pawn in a political battle between teachers and the education authority. "Penny and her friends are the ones who are suffering. This has been going on for at least 18 months. All this is just for the sake of five of a teacher."

"Penny is beginning to understand what is going on. She misses school and her friends. We give her work to do when she is at home but she is not very happy."

Industrial action began three weeks ago after talks failed between the NUT and the authority, which has

been surrounded by controversy following the breakdown of discipline at The Ridings School in Halifax.

Last week the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shepherd, decided to send in a team of government advisers to Calderdale after inspectors found the council was failing to support its schools, teachers and pupils. Mrs Shepherd said the Houghtons' threat of legal action against the authority only confirmed her decision as the right one.

Yesterday Sue McMahon, divisional secretary of Calderdale NUT, said: "The school was not being targeted for industrial action over what is acknowledged as a nation-wide problem." She added: "Teachers at the school approached us 18 months ago because they were concerned about class sizes. There were 38 children in a reception class which should have 27. They felt they could not go on in this way. The school is not being targeted. Teachers there want a solution and there had been none after 18 months."

New proposals regarding the organisation of the school are being discussed today, in an attempt to resolve the issues.

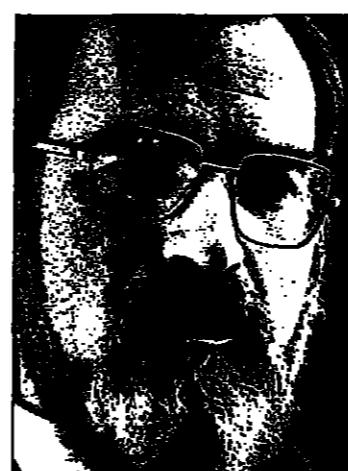
## Sacks expresses regret over leaked letter

Dr Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi (right), admitted yesterday that he had regretted over a letter in which he accused Hugo Gryn, the Reform rabbi who died last August, of being a destroyer of Judaism. But he said he was only attempting "to pre-empt civil war" between Orthodox and Reform Jews by talking to different sectors of the faith.

Speaking publicly for the first time on BBC Radio 4's *Sunday Programme* yesterday, the Chief Rabbi said he had made "regrettable mistakes". But he insisted he would not resign. "For me to resign would be to give a victory to the forces of disunity in our community."

Although Dr Sacks is widely regarded as the leader of Jews in Britain, he is technically only leader of the United Synagogues, the main Orthodox grouping.

The Reformed movement was angered last August when he did not attend the funeral of its leader, Rabbi Gryn, a Holocaust survivor and radio broadcaster. But some Orthodox Jews were equally infuriated when the Chief Rabbi attended



## Hume tops Irish presidency poll

John Hume, the SDLP leader, would be a popular choice to succeed Irish President Mary Robinson, according to a weekend opinion poll.

Mrs Robinson announced last week that she will not run again when her present seven-year term ends in December. Speaking on Irish radio yesterday, she said the Irish government had indicated its support for the idea "of my going forward for the position of UN Commissioner for Human Rights".

Mr Hume was backed by 19 per cent of those questioned in a poll for Dublin's *Sunday Independent* newspaper. Other names mentioned included the former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, with 14 per cent; and his predecessor Charles J Haughey, with 11 per cent. The former Foreign Minister, David Andrews, tipped to be the candidate of Fianna Fail, the largest party in the Irish Republic, polled just eight per cent. No candidates have declared at present.

Mr Hume appeared to rule himself out of the running for the presidency last week when he insisted his priority was to stay in politics in Northern Ireland to help achieve peace and stability there.

## briefing

## BROADCASTING

## ITC upholds complaints on monarchy debate

The Independent Television Commission has partly backed viewers' complaints concerning ITV's controversial debate on the future of the monarchy. The debate, screened in January, involved 3,000 people at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre and thousands more in a telephone poll. It sparked a storm of criticism, including 85 official complaints.

The ITC said that, while the programme had been impartial, constituted a proper subject for television and was a distinctive new format, it "could not be regarded as a programme of high quality". It agreed with many of the complainants that the audience had at times seemed out of control, that there had been a lack of scope for the development of arguments - due to the very rapid changeover and quantity of panellists - and that technical problems had overloaded the telephone voting system.

The programme's maker, Carlton, said it was "puzzled" by the ITC's position.

## MARRIAGE

## More couples tie the knot abroad

Up to 16,000 British couples will this year get married on special overseas weddings-in-paradise packages, tour operators said yesterday. Thomson, Britain's largest holiday company, said it expected to host about 4,000 couples on overseas wedding packages in 1997. "We've noticed more and more couples are wanting to arrange an overseas wedding during the English winter," said a spokeswoman.

Newlyweds are more likely to island-hop or visit several places on honeymoon rather than stay in one location like their parents, according to industry analysts.

"Interest in single-centre honeymoons has plummeted and the emphasis is on twin-centre holidays," according to Susan Williams, marketing director of specialist long-haul destination holiday company Silk Cut Travel. "We think this stems from the greater sophistication of younger people, who are likely to have experienced a wide range of overseas holidays before they get married."



## INDUSTRY

## Little headway in skills shortage

Britain and the US have made "very little" progress in reducing the proportions of workers with little or no skills in the period between 1985 and 1994, according to the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics. Far greater progress has been made in France, Germany and Singapore, the study says.

The authors blame a lack of wage differentials between the unskilled group and those with "intermediate" qualifications - the equivalent of five or more GCSEs. Individuals in the "Anglo-Saxon" countries also said it was only worthwhile achieving skills in the middle range if there was a greater possibility of going on to higher education.

Barrie Clement, the authors' lead researcher, said: "The unskilled group and those with 'intermediate' qualifications - the equivalent of five or more GCSEs. Individuals in the 'Anglo-Saxon' countries also said it was only worthwhile achieving skills in the middle range if there was a greater possibility of going on to higher education."

## PUBLISHING

## Split success for 'English Patient'

Michael Ondrej's *The English Patient* was the biggest seller in British bookshops last week, taking more than £39,000. There are two paperback versions of the novel, on which Anthony Minghella's Oscar-nominated film is based. One has a picture of Ralph Fiennes (right) on the cover, and reached number 7 in the paperback best-sellers list, while the edition with the original cover reached number 9. If everybody had bought the same edition, the combined sales would have put it at number 2.

However, the number 1 positions in both paperback and hardback were held by women last week. Catherine Cookson went straight to the top of the paperback list with *The Upstart*, knocking Graham Swift's Booker Prize-winning *Last Orders* to number 2. Patricia Cornwell topped the hardback chart with her new thriller, *The Hornet's Nest*. Adam Leigh

## SOCIETY

## Worry makes the world go round

Britons fail to take practical steps to improve their own lives - such as exercising - worrying instead about matters which are largely beyond their control, according to a MORI poll published today. "It's interesting to note that many people - young and old - don't worry about the things they can do something about to improve their lives," said a spokeswoman for Nuffield Health, which commissioned the survey of 1,742 people.

Young people (15 to 34-year-olds) worry more than the older generation about having a serious illness, being attacked or robbed, and being a victim of burglary. They also worry more about food safety, road accidents, and not having enough to live on in retirement. One in three worries about being assaulted, compared with one in five people aged between 35 and 44.



## NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING

Recycled paper made up 41.2% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1996.

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# Pinpoint accuracy informs the art of the new soft sell

**Paul McCann**  
Media Correspondent

There is an information revolution taking place in Britain that will allow advertisers and retailers to know not only what we buy and where we buy it, but also where we live, what our credit rating is, if we are alcoholics or whether we like Greek ewe's cheese.

A combination of computerised mapping software, census data, loyalty cards and supermarkets becoming banks is giving the marketing industry the unprecedented opportunity to observe how we live, what we buy ... and then to change it.

The advertising agency International Poster Management, which represents clients like Imperial Tobacco and Tesco, is offering clients maps

of postal-code areas - which can be as few as 14 houses - colour coded to show the occupants' preferences from vodka to airline destinations or life-assurance policies.

One airline client wanted to promote its new fares to Bangladesh, so IPM constructed a map using census data that showed, street by street, where all the Bengali-speakers in London lived. A small poster campaign, written in Bengali, was then booked in those areas.

"Smirnoff didn't know who bought their vodka in Scotland," said Chris Morley, chief executive of IPM. "Now we can target advertising to a particular stronghold just east of Glasgow and to the commuter routes people who live there use on their way to work or the shops."

The quest to crawl over every

inch of consumer behaviour leads to some odd sights. Poster companies recently funded a study by Birkbeck College that used a special headset that observes the dilation of the subject's pupils to can see what attracts our eyes in the street, including, of course, advertising billboards and brand names.

Not content with knowing what we look at when we're out and about, the same study quizzed 10,000 people about their travel patterns, so advertisers can catch them when not in front of the television.

When you are in your home they know who you are and who you are with. Programme-makers and advertisers were at the weekend at The Television Show conference in London that the image of the nuclear family sitting together in front of the television is rapidly go-

ing out of date. Only 35 per cent of viewing now takes place with another person, because of the rise in multi-television homes. The study of viewing, by the research company RSMB/DGA, could even tell that young families and retired people are the ones viewing on their own most.

It found that the fastest-growing market for sales of television sets is for children's bedrooms. And they can pinpoint what kind of family, whether single-parent or with young or old children, is likely to be doing the buying.

"We are the ones adding to the biggest jump in the marketing industry's knowledge of us. In the past two years we have filled in application forms for 20 million loyalty cards issued by supermarkets. The applications give only name, address and age but the supermarkets can build up a much fuller picture of us very quickly.

They pass on information to massive data banks about what we buy, when we buy it and where we live. "The loyalty cards are more about getting data than just giving loyalty points," said Sean Brierley, deputy editor of the business magazine *Marketing Week*.

The idea is that big consumers of pet food can be targeted specifically through the post with special offers or free samples.

But this is just the beginning. Last month Sainsbury's launched its own credit card and will be followed soon by Tesco. Chains of retailer such as Dixons and Shell are linking together in card schemes that will amass detailed information about our lives.

Once we start using supermarket-issued credit cards they will know our income, our credit rating and, crucially, when we're not shopping with them.

"The potential is huge," said Mr Brierley. "They can identify people who regularly buy nappies and send them special

offers for other baby products.

Or they make the connection that you won't be going to the movies much with a young baby, so through the post comes an offer on videos.

"At their most sophisticated,

the supermarkets can cross-match all sorts of consumer preferences to encourage you to take up new ones: for example, they find that people who buy olives and feta cheese usually buy Californian wine. If you've been buying the olives and cheese but not the wine they send you an offer on Californian wine, because they think you should like it and you should be buying it."

Behavioural research and tracking by big business far outstrips the funding for academic social studies research.

And the use it is put to is moving us away from a mass of anonymous consumers to small, tightly defined groups whose tastes and choices can be minutely described, predicted and, most importantly, influenced.

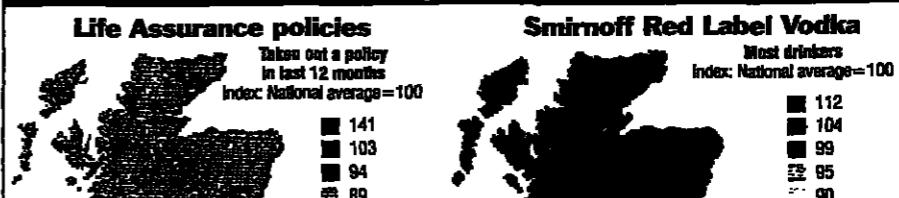
Media+tabloid



Tipple effect: Selling alcohol is now a highly focused art

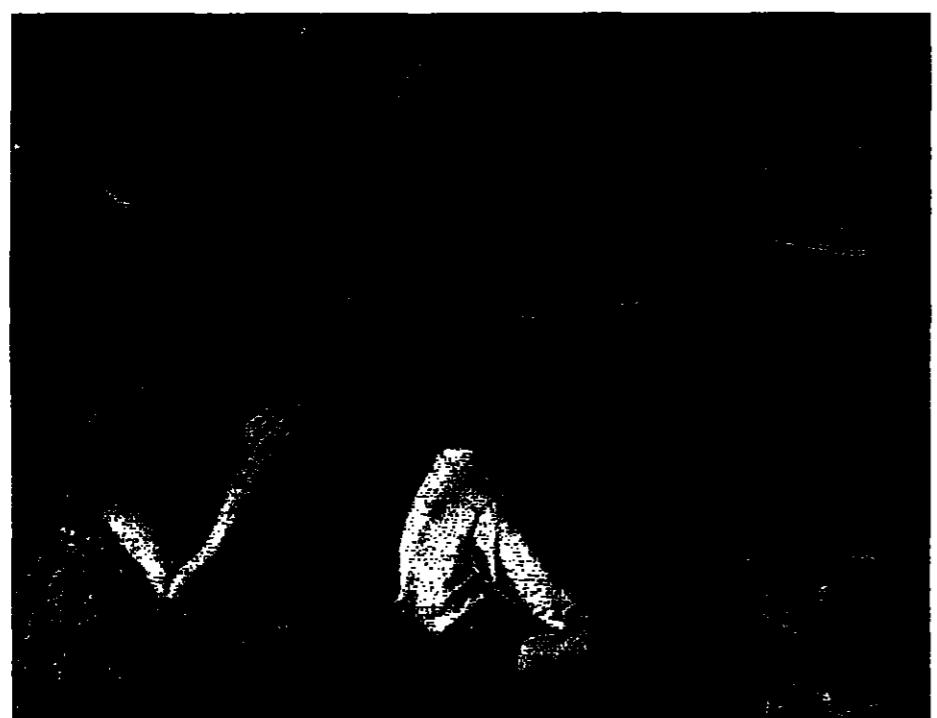
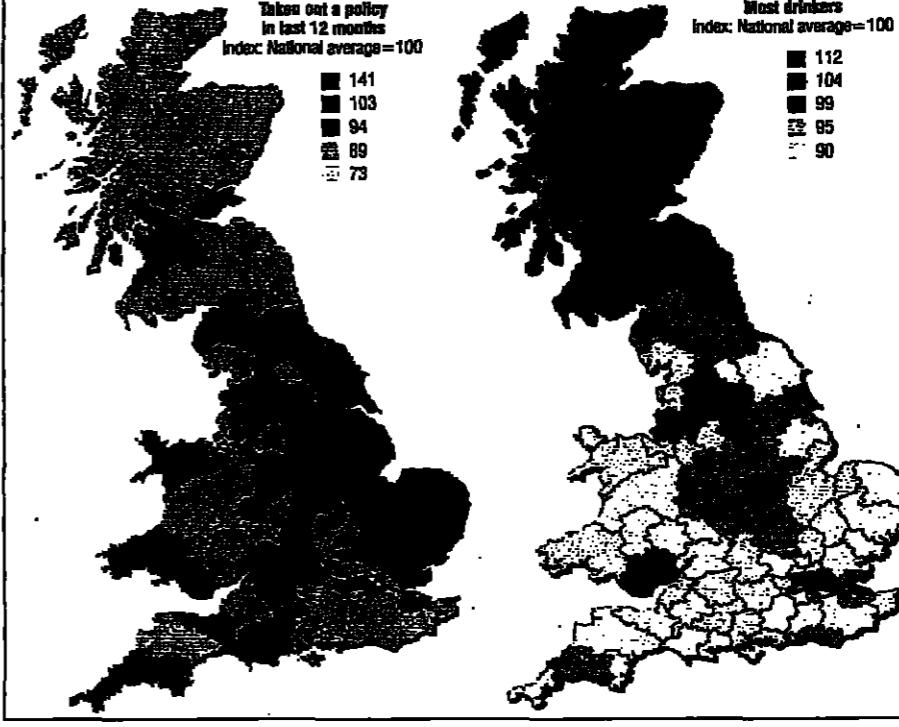
Photograph: Emma Boam

## Market potential of:



## Smirnoff Red Label Vodka

Net drinkers  
Index: National average = 100



Screen break: Only 35 percent of television viewing takes place with another person because of the rise in multi-television homes

Photograph: Hulton Getty

## Shoppers reap a new dividend

The Co-op will reintroduce its famous "Divi" in Scotland today as the supermarket loyalty battle heats up.

The Divi - short for dividend - is worth 5p for every £1 spent on Co-op brands and could be worth £60 to customers over the next 12 months.

A swipe card Divi was launched last May in Northern Ireland where £640,000 has been handed out so far. If Scotland is a success the scheme is expected to be extended

to selected Co-op regions in England.

It is seen as a competitor to supermarket loyalty cards and every £100 spent earns £5 and raises money for local causes.

This compares to a value of £1 per £100 spent offered by Sainsbury's, Tesco and Safeway, says the Co-op.

Iain McLeod, the Co-op's head of marketing, said: "For some time we have wanted to reintroduce the Divi, for which we are famous. Thanks

to the technology now available, we were able to do that last year in all our stores in Northern Ireland with spectacular results.

"Rather than opting for the incentive schemes run by our competitors, we are offering cash to our customers and help for good causes."

The Divi was first introduced in 1844 as a payment made from a Co-op society's profits to members which was related to goods bought. It died out in the

1960s and 1970s because of high administrative costs.

As part of today's move, dividend cards have been mailed to 90,000 Co-op members and are available to customers at all 155 Co-op food stores in Scotland.

Every receipt will show the cash dividend earned and this will be paid twice yearly - in July and December. Customers will be sent vouchers which can be used in Co-op stores or exchanged for cash.

## Musician tells of ruined career after boat tragedy

**Jonathan Foster**

A gifted saxophonist whose ability to control her breath helped her survive the *Marchioness* disaster will describe to the High Court in London today how her career with top rock bands was wrecked when she was plunged into the Thames.

Jo Wells, 38, spent at least three minutes under water after the pleasure cruiser's collision with a gravel barge, the *Bowbelle*.

She thought she was about to die, but surfaced suddenly and emerged from the river with only minor physical injuries. But Ms Wells has endured seven years of trauma since the night when the *Marchioness* went down with the loss of 51 lives.

The river boat had been hired for a private party, and Ms Wells was on board as a guest of Karen Jarvis, 28, her cousin, who was to die in the disaster.

Ms Wells has suffered flash-

backs, severe anxiety and she is unable to concentrate. Doctors have diagnosed that she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and she is asking the court to award damages against the respective owners of the *Marchioness* and *Bowbelle*.

Leading musicians, including Pete Townshend of The Who and her former teachers from the Royal College of Music, are expected to give evidence to the court of her exceptional musical talent and outstanding career prospects. A college examiner will describe Ms Wells as one of the best musicians he ever heard.

She was playing with bands including Tears for Fears, Kiss the Pink and the Communards before the disaster. But she subsequently lost the control of her lip that is essential to players of brass instruments.

She is now unable to work, has sold two of her saxophones, and lives on income support. A jury at a coroner's court in

1995 decided the 51 victims had been "unlawfully killed" when the 1,880-tonne *Bowbelle*, steaming at four knots, struck the stern of the *Marchioness* near the central arch of Southwark Bridge on 20 August 1989.

The pleasure boat's upper deck was ripped away; most of the dead were on the dance floor when the collision happened.

Survivors and relatives of victims claimed that those responsible for the disaster should face manslaughter charges for a "hit and run accident" in which the *Bowbelle* broke maritime rules.

The Crown Prosecution Service decided last year that no criminal charges would be brought, but owners of the two vessels have accepted liability in civil law after action by a group of relatives and survivors. A £1m fund to pay compensation was set up, but insurers for the owners have challenged individual claims for damages, including

the action begun by Ms Wells. "She will not have to prove that she is still suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder," a spokesman for Alexander Harris, her solicitors said. "She will have to prove that it was caused by the disaster."

Ms Wells, from Salford, Greater Manchester, will also have to provide the court with an accurate estimate of the career achievement she would have enjoyed had she not been involved in the disaster.

The *Marchioness* Action Group has claimed the insurers should have settled quickly.

but have chosen instead to

quibble, submitting some sur-

vivors to repeated psychiatric examination.

Relatives of the dead have

been asked for "petty" details

to support their claims, includ-

ing a mother who was asked to

prove the hourly rate her

daughter had been paid for

seven hours' work a week as a

domestic.

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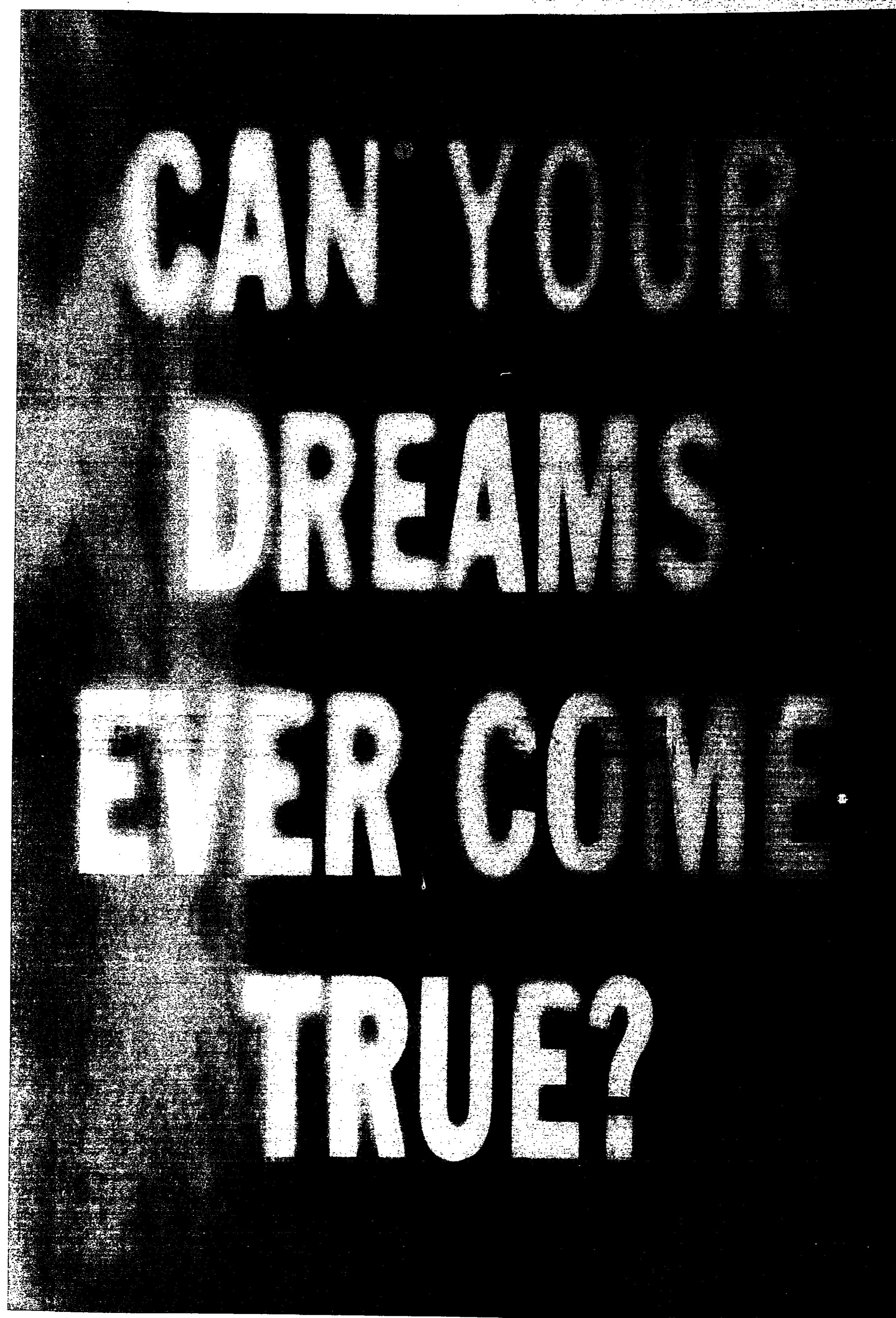
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THE DRIVE OF YOUR LIFE

Stepping out: Members of the Royal Ballet in action during a preview of a production of *La Bayadère* which opens on Saturday at Covent Garden. Photograph: Laurie Lewis

## Cancer charity's mailshots criticised

Ian Burnell

Dozens of complaints have been made about a cancer charity which is using aggressive direct-marketing tactics to induce donations from members of the public.

The World Cancer Research Fund has sent out large numbers of personally-addressed letters, which are, ostensibly aimed at recruiting volunteers for its 1997 appeal.

People who have been "selected" are told that if they are unable to participate in fundraising efforts they have the option of sending the charity a donation. The letter, signed by Marilyn Gentry, the charity's executive director, is carefully worded to give the impression that those who decline to help raise funds are inconveniencing the charity.

The "No" option on the reply form reads: "I am sorry I will not be able to help as a volunteer. But I wanted to let you know now so you will have time to find someone to replace me in my neighbourhood. I am enclosing my contribution for the amount of £10/£15/£25 more..."

Hugh Rogers, a spokesman for the Charity Commission, said: "Over the last couple of years we have had a steady drip of complaints from members of the public about the methods this charity uses to raise funds. However, they are not actually doing anything wrong."

"We have had meetings with them and they have actually modified what they have done."

"At the end of the day they are aware that some people don't like the way they raise funds, but if the charity finds it is profitable it is up to them."

Susan Osborne of the Cancer Research Campaign, Britain's biggest cancer charity, said the CRC had received "three or four dozen" complaints about its rival's letters.

"Their tactics seem to be getting increasingly heavy-handed," she said. "Cancer is a very emotive subject and one

thing guaranteed to unnerve and distress people."

One person targeted by WCRF was Doreen Cope, a pensioner of Harrow, Middlesex. She said: "I don't like the idea of people thinking they have got to be a volunteer or they have got to give money. How did they get my name and why?"

Chris Smith, Labour's health spokesman, also criticised the charity's tactics. "There's a need for a much more sensitive approach in raising money in these areas. People should not feel forced to contribute by the nature of such letters."

The World Cancer Research Fund was set up in 1990 and is one of the best-known of the 600 cancer-related charities in Britain. Closely-linked to the American Institute of Cancer Research, it funds the international study of the causes of the disease, using the slogan "Stopping Cancer Before It Starts".

Later this year, the charity is due to publish the results of a major international study into the links between cancer and diet, identifying foods which contribute to and give protection against the disease.

Christopher Coe, the charity's spokesman, said: "If we didn't ask people for money we would not be able to do anything. We apologise profusely if anybody contacts us and does not want to receive our stuff. We take them off the list immediately." He said people did have the option of throwing the request in the bin.

British charities are turning to American-pioneered methods in the increasingly competitive world of charity fundraising. The American Cancer Society now sends out up to 20 different mailshots in a single month and other American charities enclose free gifts with their letters. Research published last month by Market Movements, which monitors the use of direct mail in Britain, found that the number of charities using mailshots increased by a third last year to 402.

### DAILY POEM

#### A Roman Ruin

By Jamie McKendrick

RIP Wolseley £500. MOT  
failure cum lode, rust-plaques, cough-racked jade,  
eyebore, ossuary, tin tub, dustbin  
- that last oil can was your extreme unction.

What's left can be my memento mori  
or a monument to Britain's now decayed  
industrial base. There's a sepia postcard  
bluetacked to your walnut dashboard

of the ruined palace of one Septimus  
- weeds feasting off its arches much as moss  
(some rolling stone) does on your window rim.

O pilgrim, you who search for Rome in Rome...  
Forget it. Neither the Tiber nor the Thames  
will be graced again by your ancient chrome.

"A Roman Ruin" appears in *The Marble Fly*, Jamie McKendrick's third collection, just published by Oxford University Press (£5.99). Other means of transport feature in the poems, including a bone-shaking bicycle, a ten-gum brig, Oxfordshire canals and a banana boat. © Jamie McKendrick, 1997.

## Lottery to make villages high-tech

**Colin Brown**  
Chief Political Correspondent

National Lottery funds totalling £300m a year will be invested in high-tech computers for schools, libraries and village communities, under plans to be announced today by Virginia Bottomley, the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Mrs Bottomley will publish a document proposing that information and communication technology should become the next "good cause" for lottery funding, in addition to arts, sport, heritage and charities, after schemes to mark the millennium have been paid for.

Mrs Bottomley believes those without computer skills will "feel left behind, like those now without telephones" in the next century. *Lottery funding* will be used to bring computers into everyday life across Britain.

About 20 per cent of lottery proceeds, currently around £300m a year, is being spent on millennium projects, from the millennium centre at Greenwich to village halls.

Mrs Bottomley will today give details of the proposal for dealing with the money after the celebrations for the year 2000 are over. She will propose a range of ideas for investing the money in information and communication technology, including linking remote rural villages to hospitals and schools. It could boost the Tory election campaign by matching Tony Blair's pledges for every school to be linked up to computers under a deal with British Telecom.

Mrs Bottomley will propose that information and communications technology should become a more integral part of school life with lottery funds. Museums and galleries could make more CD-ROMs of their collections available, while libraries could become more open on the Internet.

The consultation paper will seek views on the kind of projects to be funded and will ask whether the Government should allocate a national fund, or create separate funds for Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.



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## politics

## MPs who may face a career change after the general election



**MICHAEL BATES**, MP since 1992 (Langbaugh, now Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland East, a marginal) is only 35 and has worked for financial companies but his experience will be out of date. His position as a whip will be less useful than if he had had full ministerial experience. **Employability rating 6/10**

**JERRY HAYES**, the colourful Essex MP (Harlow) since 1983, will have damaged his job prospects a bit through the alleged gay scandal with a researcher, but has possibilities in the media or public relations because of his high profile and energy. Already has some public relations consultancies. **Employability rating 5/10**

**IAN TWINN**, the unknown member for Edmonton, was a lecturer in planning before becoming an MP in 1983 and has never got beyond the most junior position as a parliamentary private secretary to various ministers. Will find it tough out there. **Employability rating 4/10**

**SIR IVAN LAWRENCE QC**, the MP for Burton and chairman of the Home Affairs select committee has continued to practise as a barrister during his time in Parliament since 1974 and therefore will have no difficulty in earning much more money, being unconstrained by having to sit in Parliament. **Employability rating 10/10**

**SEBASTIAN COE**, the former gold medallist runner who sits for the three way marginal, Falmouth, should have no trouble finding himself other work, given his reputation. He is also currently Parliamentary Private Secretary to Michael Heseltine, which may well help him get another seat. **Employability rating 9/10**

**EDWINA CURRIE**, who is defending highly marginal South Derbyshire, will not have done her prospects of getting a Euro-seat, her stated aim, any good with last week's remarks about John Major. However, with a couple of blockbuster books to her credit and a high profile, she won't be short of work. **Employability rating 8/10**

## City cold shoulders Tories on the margin

Christian Wolmar and Sam Coates

It's going to be a tough world out there for the Tory MPs who find themselves unelected in the general election.

Defeated backbench MPs who think they will be inundated by offers of lucrative directorships in the City are deluding themselves. As Hugo Summerston, who lost in Walthamstow in 1992, put it, "my phone was stone cold and the days stretched ahead of me completely empty. All this gulf about Tory MPs ending up with a clutch of City directorships is absurd."

If the Conservatives lose as they did in last month's Wirral by-election, there could be as many as 100 ex-MPs seeking jobs elsewhere. Many, including

ministers, have been discreetly contacting headhunters to make themselves available.

The head of one City recruitment agency was dismissive: "The mere fact that they have been an MP does not give them a passport to an executive, or non-executive, position. It does not mean they will necessarily get the sort of position they aspire to."

The headhunter, who did not wish to reveal his name, spoke of one conversation last week with a "middle ranking" minister. It does not mean they will necessarily get the sort of position they aspire to."

"He had already sent me his CV and rang me up for an appointment. I explained that we were client driven and that if we found a suitable post we would contact him. He insisted he wanted to see me: 'Do you

know who I am?' I had to be polite but firm. Of course I knew who he was. I had his CV in front of me, but I didn't want to waste my time seeing him."

Some MPs will have no difficulty: "If you are someone like Sebastian Coe, or are an ex-Cabinet minister with City contacts, there's no problem, but you won't need my services."

John Hird, of the Altemare Group management recruitment agency, said MPs who have languished on the backbenches for years lack the specific skills required in modern industry: "Those companies recruiting at that sort of salary level are looking for someone with a good deal of experience and skill in a particular function. Companies are not prepared to wait for somebody to learn about their business."

"He had already sent me his CV and rang me up for an appointment. I explained that we were client driven and that if we found a suitable post we would contact him. He insisted he wanted to see me: 'Do you

know who I am?' I had to be polite but firm. Of course I knew who he was. I had his CV in front of me, but I didn't want to waste my time seeing him."

While one headhunter said ministerial experience would be useful, Mr Hird was not sure. He said unless they were able to secure something through existing connections, former ministers would probably have

warning for prospective losers. Mr Sumner said: "As an MP, you are busy every minute of the day. It's very hard to adjust."

Mr Sumner's short career in Parliament cost him his marriage - "the hours are so awful"

**• The mere fact that they have been an MP does not give them a passport to an executive position**

accept less well paid jobs. According to Mr Hird, "anyone who has worked at ministerial level is going to want a higher level of salary than we would be involved in."

Certainly the experience of the 1992 "out-take" is a salutary

- and the business he ran before his election: "It was a couple of years before I got back on my feet." He started a training company, Speaker Skills Training, using the public speaking skills he had acquired as a politician, and he is back in

his former trade, in property management.

Chris Butler, an ex-MP, says they are not usually well qualified: "Prospective employers will think all they want to do is return to Parliament".

Defeat has its compensation. Mr Butler, who was defeated in Warrington South in 1992, said finding a job is not the only problem: "It's really a very great shock. Whatever the opinion polls, most MPs believe that they will hold on. They have been busy working their constituencies for years and feel they can buck the national trend. Therefore, it is a horrible surprise."

Mr Butler, now a lobbyist with Grinfeld Public Affairs, says ex-MPs may need help: "Some MPs who have lost their living could certainly do with counselling. It's such a shock

Dover, which he won in 1992, with a majority of only 860, was vociferous: "It is absolutely ludicrous to ask me and ludicrous to contemplate, and I certainly haven't done so [look for a new job] - of course not."

Other Tory MPs in marginal seats, such as Philip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) and Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan), denied they were considering other careers. Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden) was confident of bucking the trend: "I don't expect to lose my seat. It depends on how much work you do."

If they do lose, they should not expect salvation in another seat next time. Mr Sumner has an interview with the woman in charge of candidates at Central Office. "Don't count on getting back," she said.

## Howarth to fight safe Welsh seat

Tony Heath

Alan Howarth, who defected from the Tories to Labour in 1995, gave a further boost to the party's prospects yesterday when he was selected to fight the safe Labour seat of Newport East.

The MP for Stratford-upon-Avon was successful in the first ballot of party members meet-

ing at Ringland Labour Club. He polled 141 votes, with Reg Kelly, an official of the Communication Workers Union, collecting 58. Bryan Davies, the MP whose Oldham Central and Royton seat disappeared due to boundary changes, polling 49, and Helen Jones, a Merseyside solicitor, collecting 18.

Ron Davies, the shadow

Welsh secretary, expressed delight. Scratching reports of a "fix", he said Mr Howarth had won the respect and affection of the constituency. "There never was any question of anyone being parachuted in."

Mr Howarth said: "I am very moved and deeply grateful. There is a huge will for change in Britain and millions of voters at the general election are

going to take the path I have taken."

The outcome of the contest is seen as a boost to Labour prospects nationally, largely because, as party members affirmed yesterday, Mr Howarth represents middle England, which polls suggest is swinging towards Tony Blair.

He inherits a majority of nearly 10,000.

## Private schools plan free places for state sixth formers

Judith Judd  
Education Editor

State-school pupils would be able to transfer free of charge to the sixth forms of top private schools under proposals being considered by Tony Blair, the Labour leader.

The plans, put forward by Martin Stephen, high master of Manchester Grammar School, would mean that state-school students who wish to study A-level minority subjects such as Latin and those who are aiming for Oxbridge entrance, would be able to compete for places in independent schools.

Mr Blair has held a two-hour meeting to discuss the plans outlined in a paper by Dr Stephen

which has also been sent to the Tories and Liberal Democrats.

Any attempt to recreate the assisted-places scheme under which the taxpayer funds private school places for pupils to be resisted by many Labour Party members. The party has said it would abolish the scheme.

Dr Stephen, a long-standing advocate of returning the 120 former direct-grant schools to the state sector as centres of excellence, emphasised yesterday that the scheme would involve no extra cost to the taxpayer or to parents. The extra £1,000-a-year cost of funding a sixth former in a private rather than a state school would come from charity, business or the European Community.

Labour has made it clear that

Dr Stephen is talking to Oxford colleges about ways of preparing state-school pupils for Oxbridge entrance through full- or part-time attendance at private schools. Manchester Grammar School and the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle upon Tyne are also talking to universities about using independent schools to run full-time degree-level courses for former state-school pupils, particularly in science.

Dr Stephen said: "We would not be seeking to steal pupils from other institutions. We would be seeking to satisfy a need that is not being satisfied. I do not expect these proposals to prove politically controversial."

Labour has made it clear that

Dr Stephen's proposals will be explored only if it forms a government. There will be no manifesto commitment.

One-third of English local education authorities will face cuts in the cash available for schools from central government next year and the rest will not receive enough to keep pace with inflation, Labour said yesterday. Figures placed in the House of Commons library show that 41 of the 132 authorities will receive less cash this year.

A spokesman for the Department for Education said government plans allowed local education authorities to spend an extra £633m but they had the responsibility to look for savings.

## Labour faces union anger

Barrie Clement  
Labour Editor

A Labour government would face a barrage of criticism within weeks of attaining office from Britain's biggest union and one of the party's largest affiliates.

The provisional agenda for the annual conference of Unison, the 1.2 million-strong public service union, contains more than two dozen motions attacking Labour on key policies.

Other unions are expected to join the chorus of disapproval as soon as the election is out of the way. By mutual agreement Labour affiliates are currently "keeping their heads down".

Unison members are mainly angry at the pronouncement by Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, that he would stick to the Government's policy on public expenditure.

While senior Unison officials will argue that many of the critical motions for the conference in Brighton on 10 June have been tabled by the far left, there are misgivings among the membership over Labour's devotion to tight monetary policies.

Even the union's relatively moderate national executive committee has tabled a proposal which registers implicit opposition to Labour's policies. It demands a properly funded state sector. "Quality public services do not come cheap. The public cannot have European levels of public services at American levels of taxation."

The committee says it will mount a "vigorous campaign" against the pay bill freeze to which Mr Brown intends to adhere.

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## political shorts

**Heseltine warns clergy of punch-up in election**

Michael Heseltine, the deputy prime minister, yesterday warned Church leaders that they "will get as good as they give" if they enter the political fray in the run-up to the general election.

Mr Heseltine responded aggressively to leaked details of a major report sponsored by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, which accuses politicians of abandoning the poor. It will be seen as a scathing attack on 18 years of Conservative rule.

Speaking on BBC Radio's *Sunday programme*, Mr Heseltine said: "I think it's perfectly legitimate for them to express a political view," he said. "But I have one warning - that if they trespass on the field of politics then they will get as good as they give."

The Church report, which is due to be published on 8 April, warns: "In the British general election campaign, the political parties are competing for votes by promising lower taxation. When so many are living in poverty and unemployment, it is wrong to give priority to the claims of those who are already well off." The report is believed to recommend a minimum wage and cuts in employer National Insurance to boost private sector jobs. Ian Barrell

**Blair is Thatcher's 'next choice'**

Baroness Thatcher has said there is "nothing to fear" from a Labour government under Tony Blair, it was confirmed yesterday by Paul Johnson, the Thatcherite commentator.

Confirmation that Lady Thatcher privately believes the Britain will be safe in Mr Blair's hands will blow a massive hole in Tory election strategy, which is based on the fear of a "leap in the dark" with Labour.

"As Thatcher has said to me and to others, we have no reason to fear a Blair government," Mr Johnson revealed in the *Sunday Telegraph*. "Ideally, she would still like to lead the country herself. That now seems impossible. But Blair is her next choice."

Mr Johnson says the former prime minister told him she regards the Labour leader as "a British patriot" and "she is confident not only that he will refuse to sell the country short but that he will be a match for Kohl, Chirac and their like." Mr Johnson opined: "I suspect that to Thatcher ... Blair is the 'good' son she never had."

Colin Brown  
Chief Political Correspondent

The first televised election debate between the party leaders in a British election will go ahead, senior Tory Party sources said last night, in spite of a row over John Major's refusal to appear with Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrat leader.

Mr Major was accused of a "cynical ploy" by Labour and the Liberal Democrats after he announced that he was ready to hold a series of televised debates with Tony Blair, but not Mr Ashdown, during the election campaign in an attempt to break Labour's overwhelming lead in the opinion polls. His refusal to hold a three-way debate threatened to scupper the plan. Mr Major may be told within the next 48 hours to back down or take the blame. But senior Tories were calculating on the

broadcasters reaching a compromise to satisfy all sides.

The broadcasters told the Liberal Democrats their legal

advisers have warned that if Mr Ashdown was not part of the televised debates, they would be breaking the Representation of the People Act, which requires "due impartiality and fairness" in election broadcasting.

"We don't want this to be seen as the Liberal Democrats

is the Home Office Bill on minimum sentences, softened by Labour peers, which the Government is determined to overturn. If Jack Straw, the shadow Home Secretary, refuses to allow it to be changed and nodded through, the Tories will accuse Labour of being soft on crime.

Once the horse-trading is over, the House of Commons will rise on 25 or 26 March, after a Labour initiated debate, and the last session of Prime Minister's Questions, for a short recess for Easter. The

dissolution of Parliament could take place a week earlier than expected, on or just after 1 April, because the Tories believe they will have a better chance of closing the Labour lead with a longer campaign to target their attack on Tony Blair.

The Major campaign bus could start rolling on 2 April with seven campaign rallies before polling day - the first on 4 April at the Royal Albert Hall, scene of the Union Jack extravaganza on the last night of the Proms.

Asked if Mr Major was going to debate with Mr Ashdown, Dr Mawhinney said: "No - we're talking [about] a choice of two futures, not a choice of three futures, and a choice of two possible prime ministers, not a choice of three possible prime ministers. I think the people want to hear, to see, to have the opportunity them-

would have to be "prime ministerial" debates.

Asked if Mr Major was going to debate with Mr Ashdown, Dr Mawhinney said: "No - we're talking [about] a choice of two futures, not a choice of three futures, and a choice of two possible prime ministers, not a choice of three possible prime ministers. I think the people want to hear, to see, to have the opportunity them-

selves to judge from the mouths of the two men, one of whom will be leader of this country after the general election."

Labour's campaign manager,

Peter Mandelson, said he wanted to see the debates go ahead but did not think they would.

Speaking on LWT's *CrossTalk* programme, he said: "I think the Prime Minister is being typically two-faced about this. He claims he wants a debate but behind the scenes he is putting every obstacle in the way to prevent one happening." He said the Mr Major was trying to choose "tame hand-picked" broadcasters to ask the questions.

The Scottish National Party

said its leader, Alex Salmond, should be included in any television debate shown in Scotland. And Dafydd Wigley, leader of Plaid Cymru, said there should be "structures" to enable the minor parties to take part.

**Political game show that changes path of history**

David Usborne  
New York

It has become the high noon of the modern political process in the United States. Two candidates - on one occasion three - deprived of their minders, spinners and speech consultants and thrown before the lights and the cameras for 90 minutes to show off the qualities that make one better than the other.

Richard Nixon first saw the extraordinary opportunity offered by live television in 1960. Just barely ahead of John F Kennedy in the race for the White House, he agreed to what became the first-ever presidential debate. Decades later, the television debate has taken root as a key quadrennial ritual on the US political scene. And now, it seems, the tradition is crossing the Atlantic.

That night, of course, became infamous and still vividly illustrates how a television debate can divert the flow of an election. Kennedy, who was little known to the public, was charming, knowledgeable and, above all, good-looking. Nixon, however, was clumsy and did a passable impression of a mob hit-man. It did not help that he had spurned all make-up except for a cosmetic to cover his five o'clock shadow. Under the glare of the studio, the cream began to streak with disastrous effect.

So awful was Nixon's experience - he was beaten by Kennedy by a hair-thin margin a few weeks later - there were no more debates for another 16 years. Jimmy Carter agreed to one, however, in 1976. Once again, the impact was decisive. Gerald Ford offered a dazzling display of ignorance and insensitivity when he suggested that there was "no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe".

Four years later, Mr Carter, found himself eclipsed by an ebullient former governor of California, Ronald Reagan's "winning". There you go again: he is part of the lore of presidential debates alongside Lloyd Bentsen's devastating zinger in a 1988 vice-presidential debate with Dan Quayle, "I knew Jack Kennedy ... you're no Jack Kennedy".

Mr Carter had gone into the



Gladiators: Nixon and Kennedy starting a trend in 1960 (Main picture: Archive Photos); right, Carter and Reagan in 1980; left, Labour's deputy leader, John Prescott, and Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, preparing for Granada TV's debate before last month's Wirral South by-election

**Feel-good factor starts to falter**

The recovery in the feel-good factor among small companies appears to be in danger of faltering, according to a survey published today.

The number of small and medium-sized firms reporting an improvement in the business and economic climate fell in the first quarter of 1997, the Enterprise Barometer from capital venture group 3i showed. There was a marked fall in the number of companies expecting an increase in profit in the current quarter. Ewen Macpherson, chief executive of 3i, said: "Many small and medium-sized companies are exporters, or suppliers to exporters, and their less optimistic outlook may well reflect the impact of the appreciation of sterling on margins."

**Employers tilt to Labour win**

More than half of the UK's leading employers want a Labour government, according to a survey published today. Out of almost 248 business leaders, 44 per cent said they believed a majority Conservative government would be best for their business, with 39 per cent for Labour.

But on a personal basis, 44 per cent said they wanted the Tories to win and 41 per cent backed Labour. Another 11 per cent believed a Labour government, dependent on Liberal Democrat support, would be best for their business, and 10 per cent personally wanted that outcome.

Peter Walker, managing director of management consultancy Vista Communications, which carried out the research, said: "With 51 per cent personally hoping either for a majority Labour Government, or one ruling with Liberal Democrat support, it appears Tony Blair's charm offensive has won over half of our industrial leaders."

**Bosses shrug off minimum pay**

Almost 8 out of 10 British employers would be unaffected by a national minimum wage set at £3.25 an hour, the kind of level at which a Labour government might set the rate. A study published today by Reed Personnel Services found 15 per cent of employers reported such a statutory minimum would have an impact on their business. At £4 an hour, however, the rate thought to be favoured by the TUC, more than a third said they would be affected. Alec Reed, chairman of the employment agency, said it was important that implementation was not railroaded through. Barrie Clement

debate a little ahead of Mr Reagan in the polls, but one week later he was ejected by the voters. Attributing the reversal to the debate, the pollster George Gallup remarked: "It was one of the most dramatic shifts ever recorded in voter preference."

With the stakes so high, it is inevitable that agreeing the

game rules will be fraught. In the US, it is unthinkable now that any candidate would dare to decline to participate in a debate. But the format - who should take part, who should moderate - quickly becomes the subject of intense squabbling, with the Federal Debates Commission having the final say.

In 1992, Ross Perot broke the

mould when he was allowed to take part as a third participant. His inclusion livened the debate immeasurably and assuredly helped him finally achieve almost 20 per cent of the popular vote. On the urging of both Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, he was excluded from the debates

by the Federal Debates Commission last year on the tricky premise that he had no realistic chance of winning the race. Also spurned was John Hagelin, the Natural Law Party leader.

In spite of the many colourful moments cherished by political historians, for the most part the US debates are dull and

scripted. Candidates vanish into purdah for days beforehand to buff up their knowledge and to pre-cook those so-called spur-of-the-moment zingers. The 1996 debates, especially those between the vice-presidential candidates, broke all records for boringness, as shown by sharply lower viewership figures.

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**How politics was given a screen break**

Former prime ministers learned to love and hate the cameras



Harold Wilson: Sought the advice of a film director

both main party leaders ap-

peared regularly on the small

screen. Conservative leader Sir

Alec Douglas-Home believed

the election "began to turn"

when he lost his composure and

hollowed to drown out hecklers

at a rowdy meeting in Bir-

mingham.

"I blame myself for not

studying the techniques of televi-

sion more than I did," he said

later.

More at ease on the grouse

moors than in television studios,

he pleaded with a make-up

woman to "make me look bet-

ter than I do on TV". The

woman replied that she couldn't

do anything "because you've got

a head like a skull".

His Labour opponent,

Harold Wilson, needed to

help rectify his failings in the

white heat of the technological

revolution to the television

cameras. At the outset of the

campaign, though, he did go to

Hugh Greene, the BBC's then

director-general, to express his

"very real worry" about his

television image.

fact that the sitcom *Stepney & Son* was scheduled for trans-

mission on polling day and might suppress the turnout in Labour's heartland. The DG obligingly postponed the trans-

mission to 9pm.

But it was not long before

Wilson was warring with the BBC and accusing it of an anti-

Labour bias. In 1976, the

Labour leader stormed out of a special studio which the BBC had hitched onto the train

transporting him from his Liver-

pool constituency to London on election night.

The BBC only managed to

script an interview by strate-

gically positioning a new recruit,

Desmond Wilcox, on the plat-

form at Euston station. Wilson

thought Wilcox was still with

the commercial sector, with

which he always felt more com-

fortable.







# Hussein mourns as peace crumbles

Patrick Cockburn  
Jerusalem

King Hussein of Jordan yesterday visited the families of the seven teenage Israeli girls murdered by a Jordanian soldier last week, as Israel prepared to go ahead with building a controversial Jewish settlement at Har Homa in Jerusalem.

The King made a last-minute effort to dissuade Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, from building. But David Levy, the Foreign Minister, said: "The government's decision stands and will be executed."

Members of the government known to be opposed to the Oslo peace accords in the past are becoming vociferous. Threatening that Israeli forces might re-enter Gaza to expel Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, Zachi Hanegbi, the Minister of Justice, said: "Whoever launches violence could very quickly find himself packing a suitcase and travelling backwards and forwards from Tunis to Baghdad as he [Arafat] did for many years."

Ethan Haber, a former adviser to Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister assassinated in 1995, said: "Har Homa may be the tombstone of Oslo."

Earlier, King Hussein, accompanied by Mr Netanyahu, visited the families

of the seven girls from a school at Beit Shemesh, west of Jerusalem, to offer his condolences. All were in deep mourning, sitting for seven days on mattresses on the floor, as prescribed by religious ritual. The Jordanian leader was received with bread and salt before telling Israel Patrikhi that he mourned his daughter's death as if "I lost my daughter."

In halting English, Mr Patrikhi, of Yemenite origin, read a letter he had prepared calling for peace between Jordan and Israel. He said: "It is closer from here to Amman [the Jordanian capital] than it is from here to Haifa [in Israel]." King Hussein said: "The memory of your daughter will live with me forever. I hope her memory will give you strength."

Many of those who lost their children are Jews originally from North Africa, and older family members spoke to the King in Arabic. One man said afterwards that he had wanted to ask the King, but had been overcome by the occasion, why Jordanian soldiers had at first not allowed Israeli medical teams to tend the wounded.

Meiri, the mother Yaela Miri, said: "They didn't even let the teachers console the girls who were dying."

The massacre at Naharin, on the River Jordan, overshadowed a conference of foreign diplomats summoned



Sad meeting: King Hussein touching his heart as he speaks to the mother of Sivan Fathi, one of the murdered Israeli girls. He was accompanied by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (centre) and Foreign Minister David Levy. Photograph: Reuters

## St PETERSBURG DAYS

### Curtain stays drawn over the window to the West

No matter how friendly and hospitable they are – and, despite their legendary solemnity, they have both qualities in great measure – Russians are experts in the art of making visitors feel ... well, just that, like visitors.

This is often the result of a certain over-formality. But occasionally you feel as if the word "foreigner" has been sprayed across your forehead in flashing neon letters.

My Volvo car, like that of every foreign resident in Moscow, is a giant mobile passport, designed by bureaucrats to blare the world "alien" to the world beyond. One glance at my licence plates, and a traffic cop knows I am a foreigner (yellow plates, as opposed to the usual white ones), a correspondent (code letter "K") from Britain (number "001").

Occasionally, you meet expert code-breakers. If a Mercedes bearing a "D", "038" and red plates races past, they know at once that they have been humbled by a diplomat from Iceland. If they cut up a Toyota Land Cruiser with an "007" yellow plate and the letter "M", they can expect an eyeballing from an irate French business executive. Even the most explosive road rager

• Six years on it has failed to live up to its billing as Venice of the North

would think twice before picking a fight with a car bearing the registration "048" and CMD". Who wants to cross Libya's "Chef de Mission: Diplomatiqe"?

This sense of estrangement is underpinned by a multitude of details, the legacy of the Soviet Union's obsession with categorising everyone, which ranges from the airline official who baldly refers to you as the "inostreane" – "foreigner" – to rules at some stations, which state that foreigners must buy rail tickets at a different booth to everyone else.

Although related by comparison with the Communist era, the Russians are still wary of their old enemies. (So, to be fair, are the British, as every Russian who has been interrogated about an application for a visa will tell you.)

There is one place in Russia where you would not expect to feel that flashing forehead light. Peter the Great founded St Petersburg as his window on Europe, a Western capital which would suffice a backward and self-involved Russia with a blast of fresh ideas from Paris, Amsterdam and London. Yet,

almost 300 years on, as it peers bleakly out into the Baltic, that window is still clouded.

I was there this month. The place looks European enough, at least in the centre. Among the ice-bound canals and breathtaking bombings, there are bars, banks, chic Western boutiques, and several top-class international hotels. And yet, for all its cosmopolitan surface, this is a city with deep Soviet roots, and where foreigners are still seen as outsiders.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, there were hopes that St Petersburg would flourish, nurtured by its proximity to the rest of Europe – Helsinki is just across the water – and by its tourism industry, the rewards of the fabulous artistic and architectural legacy from the tsars.

Six years on, it has yet to live up to its billing as the Venice of the North. It retains the flavour of a provincial base which is quietly fuming over the supremacy of Moscow, while its 3 million citizens doggedly wrestle with ingrained Soviet habits.

These include a combination of red tape, crime and suspicion. I had to negotiate with three different receptionists before getting a room key in my city-centre hotel. The problem is deep in the heart of the place. "Don't talk to me about bureaucrats, it's a very sore point," said Kira Kenney, when I dropped into "The Idiot", her newly opened basement cafe and book-shop.

Ms Kenney is a Russian artist who, after years of globe-trotting, returned to her home city to start a business. She has had no help from officialdom. Quite the reverse. Before opening, she had to fight off demands for a \$20,000 (£11,000) bribe. These days, just to remain open, she has to pay out about \$300 a week to keep officials at bay.

At the moment, her city is in a particularly unhappy mood. It has just failed to make the shortlist of five to host the 2004 Summer Olympics. Its bid envisaged 20 new hotels, a highway linking the city with Helsinki and Moscow, and a new ring road. It was an ambitious plan that would have pumped billions of dollars into its struggling economy.

Perhaps its chances were marred by memories of the 1994 Goodwill Games, which suffered several over-blown PR disasters, notably, a swimming event disrupted by a cloudy pool and the failure to make decent ice for the figure skaters.

But it also surely damaged its prospects because no one could be sure if its bureaucrats can mend their ways and finally open up the window looking West – bringing a gust of fresh air which would allow Russians and outsiders to work together in a world uncomplicated by bribes, xenophobia and stupid numberplates.

Phil Reeves

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## arts

## A master stroke

## CLASSICAL

Die

## Meistersinger

ROH, London

To a tumultuous welcome, Bernard Haitink swept to the podium and raised his hands in a gesture which seemed to say, "Silentum! Silentum!" Here come *Die Meistersinger*. At last. After three-and-a-half years of waiting for this first revival of Graham Vick's masterly production, Haitink for one was not about to prolong the anticipation. In an account of the prelude which was in every sense a portent of things to come, being rich, good-humoured, the warmest of embraces, he caught both the tide of the audience's enthusiasm and the irresistible pull of Wagner's inspiration. Like all great *Meistersingers*, this one glowed. It glowed with a vividness that precious few can command, it glowed with the promise of midsummer magic, of love's sweet dreams and the spirit of creativity.

It's an innocent, sun-kissed world that Vick and his designer Richard Hudson have evoked here. The colours are bright and honest – oranges and yellows and greens by day, indigo blue by night. A picturesque pageant, tales of yore replete with jolly townsfolk, crisply costumed. And all of it suffused in a rosy, surreal light (Wolfgang Göbel). But into this dream-world, real people have wandered. Vick maintains an historical context, a tangible sense of time and place. In the very opening scene, a procession of children and their elders pass through the church carrying perfect little wooden replicas of old Nuremberg landmarks. Civic pride. By Act 2, those replicas have grown into a full-scale model village which *Brüderingnagian* apprentices eagerly dust down in readiness for the approaching festivities.

But the real joy of Vick's work is in the fine detail, the fidelity to text. It could be argued that the Act 2 riot – in which Vick, in a capricious allusion to the night-watchman's warnings about evil spirits abroad, unleashes an Hieronymus Bosch-like nightmare with ghostly night-gowned figures spewing through every orifice of the set – is too fanciful, too slapstick-comical to be genuinely disturbing. After all, Sachs's disillusionment in Act 3 should have some basis in reality. The more so since John Tomlinson's bluff, unsentimentally human Sachs is about as real as they come. When he finally gives vent to his frustration, his anger, in the penultimate scene, your heart goes out to him. When he gathers his "family" about him to choose a name for Walther's prize song and chokes on the emotion of the words "may it grow and prosper", you see a mad of vision rising above the mundane. I should have liked a few quieter moments from this Sachs, a gentler, more gratifying *l'gato* for his balmy nocturnal monologue in Act 2. No question that all those Wotans have taken their toll. The big, dark, callused voice doesn't really speak now at much less than *mezzo-forte*. But what a truthful, heartfelt, commanding performance.

And what a perfect contrast to Thomas Allen's funny, entirely believable Beckmesser. Believable because this Beckmesser is for once a *meistersinger* before he is a buffoon. Whether fussing with his spectacles or checking for dust on the marker's booth, this prim, prissy, preening creation is as fine as Part of his voice which is still here preserved – the upper part. Gösta Winbergh (Walther) gets ample opportunity to exercise his upper parts, of course, and would be ideal if he could find ways of relaxing into, yielding a little more to his prize-winning song. Or maybe Nancy Gustafson's radiant Eva is prize enough. There is a new Magdalene from the excellent Catherine Wyn-Rogers and a strapping puppy of a David – appropriately (though not, I suspect, intentionally) gauche in voice and manner – from Herbert Lippert.

Vick ensures that we are all a part of "the big picnic" which is *Die Meistersinger*'s final scene. At the centre of it is Sachs, the proud face in a sea of faces. And in our ears is Wagner: voices and trumpets raised in affirmation. When it's as good as this, we've no right to expect better. *Further perf. Fri. Mon 24 (0171-304 4000)*

Edward Seckerson



In the name of the father: (clockwise from top left) George Grosz with hat and revolver, in his studio, by Ivo Kranzfelder, 1918. © Estate of George Grosz; Self Portrait, 1917 © Sammlung Karsch / Nierendorf, Berlin; Grosz 'Rogues at the Bar', 1922. © DACS; Marty Grosz

To celebrate the great George Grosz, see his art and his son. By Rosie Millard

# My father, the famous artist

concert. We played 'Blue Skies' and 'Old Man River'; my parents were so surprised! After that, I was driven. My mother wanted me to go to university, but my father thought everyone should have the chance to do his own thing. He'd come up to my room and have me play along to old records. He'd bring a bottle of wine, two cigars, and his enthusiasm."

On the face of it, growing up with George Grosz was an extraordinary experience. "He was such a performer. He was always doing little songs, putting sheets over his head, acting out stories. And painting. But behind the fun there was a deep embitterment. And his drinking, drinking and not working. In the end the periods of not working got longer. Eventually he just stopped."

In the Fifties Eva persuaded George to try living in Berlin once more. "Just for half of each year. Everyone thought he could get his old flair back. But he knew it would never be the same, and it wasn't. He just wondered what the whole point of everything, even art itself, was. Jackson Pollock and those guys were around. My father's day had passed." Including, one suspects, a belief that art combined with a political message could change the world. After what would be his final return to Germany, Grosz collapsed after a drinking bout and died.

He is buried in Berlin, the city with which he'll always be synonymous, yet it is not Grosz, the artist who changed his name to appear more cosmopolitan, but his son Marty, who is the true internationalist. "When the time comes, where will be buried? I have loose views about national boundaries. I don't care. As long as it's not in outer space."

*The Berlin of George Grosz: Drawings, Watercolours and Prints 1912-1930*, opens Thurs RA, London W1 (0171-439 7438) to 8 June; *Marty Grosz in Concert at the RA*, Sat, 7pm (0171-494 5665). Tom Lubbock will review the exhibition on 25 March. *Rosie Millard* is the BBC's Arts Correspondent

**M**arty Grosz, Paloma Picasso and Julian Lennon must be fellow sufferers. For any child, the weight of bearing the same surname as an internationally famed artist at a distance of only one generation should be sufficient to stunt any creative gifts. Marty's a brave man, then, coming over from America to play jazz at the George Grosz retrospective at the Royal Academy.

Admittedly, he's hardly an amateur. Grosz Junior and his jazz guitar have appeared at festivals all over the world. He is a prolific recording artist who cut his first record in 1950, has made star appearances in movies such as *Tootsie* and *Bullets Over Broadway* and is a renowned jazz champion of original and rare works. But compared to his "old man", as he calls his father, the radical satirist George Grosz, he's not quite in the same league.

Not that he minds too much. There were distinct benefits in having parents who courted amid the wild scenes of Twenties Dadaist Berlin, whose artistic exploits included climbing up ladders and pouring buckets of water over people's heads. "Sure, we kids were overshadowed," says Marty. "But when my father was working and everything was going right, it was a 24-hour-a-day performance."

Indeed, Grosz, who died in 1959, would have been proud of his son, not least for his chosen musical style, his twang and his relentless Yankee clichés ("So, you'll be having bangers and mash for dinner, tonight, right?"). For while his work encapsulates Twenties Berlin, Americana was dear to George Grosz.

Born Georg Gross in 1893, he Americanised his name in 1916, at the height of the First World War, in which he fought. At the same time he began to play the banjo, smoke a pipe and wear clothes tailored in the American style. It was an outward symbol of his growing estrangement from the German

establishment. After the war, Grosz pursued a highly politicised artistic life. Living in the heart of bohemian Berlin, he contributed to several left-wing magazines. His cartoons, paintings and drawings depicted a searching yet passionate view of Berlin's decadence and corruption. His unblinking attack on the turmoil that was post-war Germany projected a desire for work "tough, brutal, transparent, an art that hurts. We've got enough lullabies," he wrote.

When the Reichstag was torched in 1933, Grosz found himself in the unenviable position of a Cassandra. The Fascist rule he had lobbied so vehemently against had arrived; disillusioned by the inability of either Communism or art to wreak political change, and suspecting his art had, perversely, heightened the fame of the Nazi cause, Grosz left for a teaching job at New York's Art Students' League, and took his family.

"Having been through the First World War, he could see it all happening again," says Marty Grosz. "He forecast the coming of Hitler. He had caricatured him as early as 1923. The Nazis declared him Bolshevik enemy No 1. The Brownshirts raided his studio several times. He was openly critical of the regime – but no one wanted to know."

Marty was three when George took his wife Eva and son West. "We travelled on the *Bremen*, which

had the Blue Riband for the fastest Atlantic crossing. When we were a day off New York," he says. "I remember watching a red sea-plane catapulting off the deck, carrying bags of airmail into Manhattan."

The family was thrown into American life in a similarly abrupt manner. "We lived in a hotel in Manhattan for a few months, then my parents moved to a house in the New York suburbs." It became a haven for fellow European intelligentsia driven away by war. "Our home was never without foreigners, people my father would vouch for, in order that they could get jobs." Publishers, professors from the University of Berlin, teachers who'd escaped from concentration camps, all came to stay. Bertolt Brecht was a frequent visitor.

The experience of exile effected Grosz deeply. Although at first he depicted Manhattan with his characteristic zest, he began to despair that his earlier work was unsuitable for the New World. "He couldn't resume his stance," explains Marty. "He was a satirist, but he refused to bite the hand that fed him. In addition, he didn't really know the language or the customs of America. All the references had changed."

While Marty and his brother Peter enthusiastically embraced their new life, their father's periods of artistic dormancy lengthened. He and his guests talked in German

long into the night. "I would hear them. There was a lot of unhappiness. Guilt, at having left; but also frustration. My father would get drunk frequently, and rail at those who had sat back and done nothing. He would say, 'Hitler rolled in, as if we hadn't been there'."

None the less, Grosz's reputation was not completely overlooked. He appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine; he had his portrait taken by Robert Penn for *Time*. "I would be introduced as 'Grosz's son,'" says Marty. "The art establishment was so conservative then," he explains. "People would go to museums for a bit of peace and quiet. No one knew about modern art or Dada. All my schoolmates had boats and played tennis at country clubs. They thought my father was shocking."

And by all accounts, fairly laid-back. "My father was a wonderful draughtsman; but in the back of the class people were playing chess," says Marty. "Grosz claiming money off the government for college courses. My dad simply said, 'I pay attention to people who really care about drawing. As long as the others pay their fees, I don't care what they do.' And after the classes, he'd give these wonderful talks on art."

But Marty realised it would be impossible to match his father. "It was tough to carry that name. In order to grow, I had to get out of his shadow." When he was a child, he discovered a ukulele in the attic, and strummed the jazz tunes Grosz would whistle around the house. But his interest took hold when he was at boarding school; hitching to hear a big band in Boston caused his expulsion. Grosz was delighted his son was bent on such an unconventional path. "He loved it. I was 15 and my father was having a party, got together with a quasi-extension of his father. He even managed to get expelled from high school at the same age as

Grosz Senior had. And he showed artistic talent. "I was always drawing, cartooning and things. My father's friends used to pay me on the head and say, 'He's just like his father.' When I was about 17 I even enrolled at the old man's classes. They were wonderful. Packed."

And, by all accounts, fairly laid-back.

"My father was a wonderful draughtsman; but in the back of the class people were playing chess," says Marty. "Grosz claiming money off the government for college courses. My dad simply said, 'I pay attention to people who really care about drawing. As long as the others pay their fees, I don't care what they do.' And after the classes, he'd give these wonderful talks on art."

But Marty realised it would be impossible to match his father. "It was tough to carry that name. In order to grow, I had to get out of his shadow." When he was a child, he discovered a ukulele in the attic, and strummed the jazz tunes Grosz would whistle around the house. But his interest took hold when he was at boarding school; hitching to hear a big band in Boston caused his expulsion. Grosz was delighted his son was bent on such an unconventional path. "He loved it. I was 15 and my father was having a party, got together with a quasi-extension of his father. He even managed to get expelled from high school at the same age as

## THEATRE

## Widows; Badfinger

Oxford Playhouse;

Donmar Warehouse

narrator, a Dorfman substitute who agonises about the position of the exile and the moral propriety of writing about suffering from a distance, before getting swallowed up in the story. For all that he may reflect the author's own principled self-doubt, this figure comes across as an irritating distraction.

If *Widows* is reminiscent of Lorca, then Simon Harris's *Badfinger* – with its tawdry junk-shop setting, its all-male cast and its inventive profanities – can't help but put you in mind of *American Buffalo*. One of the jokes is that this is Mamet transferred to Wales, which is a bit like imagining Ivy Compton Burnett shifted to Chicago. Another is that all the would-be tough-guy stuff, involving psychotic religious maniacs and insinuating blackmailers, takes place round a man (excellent Robert Blythe) who is heavily into directing amateur dramatic musicals and into "protecting" under-age boys.

Michael Sheen's enjoyable, beautifully performed production has bags of flair, as does the witty script. But with the weather taking an apocalyptically turn, the proceedings become increasingly far-fetched. It's as blackly silly and delightful acting vehicle rather than any kind of statement about human relationships that *Badfinger* impresses. *Widows* is on tour; *Badfinger* runs to Sat (0171-369 1732).

Paul Taylor

## THEATRE

## The Landslide

West Yorkshire Playhouse,

Leeds

Strange how a new play that is not only up to the minute but plausibly beyond it should be so old-fashioned. True our first sight is of the lady of the house carrying a cafetiere rather than a maid carrying a silver tea-pot, but in every other way we could be in one of Finney's social plays. Bang Andy de la Tour's walls and they sound reassuringly of the joists of solid construction and best lime-and-hair characterisation.

This is appropriate enough, for the work depends on the kind of exact social detail – well delivered in Gwendolyn Hughes's production – that only realism can provide.

It becomes apparent, too, that its stylistic devotion to tradition mirrors an ideological one. The landslides of the title belongs first to Tony Blair and to the new MP for Bentham, Felicity – or more New Labourish, Fliss – Anderson (Jenna Russell). It took a 19 per cent swing to dislodge St John Hewitt from the seat his

forebears had held since Lloyd George was in his pomp, but St John, a quintessential One Nation man with a mind as broad as his acres, is apparently taking it well. When Fliss comes to Bentham Hall to enlist his aid in shelving an intrusive local development plan he acquiesces.

"How very civil this country is," says his son Peter. A little too predictably, the middle ground soon extends to the bedroom. The attraction of Christopher Rattner's St John is his patrician mix of languid grace and mocking acerbity, not least towards his own side. But, as a politician, he would not set Machiavell to school, he could teach him at home,

both recognise, neither St John nor Fliss have any value system outside their own interest. De la Tour's satire of both is well observed and, until the melodramatic conclusion, fillets very finely.

But, like most satirists, his

vision is fundamentally pessimistic and nostalgic. His disgust at St John is mainly at the personal pathology glimpsed from the start in Rattner's lip and eye, which is destroying Peter (the fine Raymond Coulthard). The only cynosure is the wife, Jessica, with her dignity, good works and profound sense of the family's duty to its inheritance and the community. Nuanced and sympathetic as Deborah Norton is in the role, if New Labour can furnish no more than Lady Bountiful's true we are in trouble.

To 5 April. Booking: 0113 244 2111; then at Birmingham Repertory Theatre, booking: 0121 644 6464. **Jeffrey Weinwright**

**Tomorrow in the Tabloid:** Tom Lubbock on August Sander. Plus Network+, the computer and IT section

## In love and the pub, I am so alone

You choose a new partner, but you don't choose his old friends.

**Victoria Thorpe**  
finds herself in the awkward role of intrusive outsider

I am sitting in a pub feeling hugely uncomfortable. It is a Saturday night in Camden and the whole world is getting horrendously drunk. Conversation is the meaningless, opinionated waffle that comes only after four hours of alcohol abuse. Opposite me, three girls are chatting and laughing. On the other side, a group of blokes are standing in pint-and-fag pose, sorting out the world. I am with them all; we are all in the same group. And yet we're not, not really.

These are my partner's friends. I am among them only because I am his girlfriend — there is no shared history between us, no memories of long conversations into the night, sobbing fits or blissful successes. I've been propelled into their world by falling in love with Tim, their mate.

Meeting your partner's friends can be a nightmare. Logic would suggest that it should be problem-free: a person is usually attracted to similar types of people; it should follow that everyone has lots in common. Unfortunately, it's rarely that simple. Much as I would love the girls to make room on their couch and let me in on the joke, or the boys to ask me my opinion on the latest Arsenal defeat (hurrah), or whether Kula Shaker really are a bunch of posturing ponce (not at all), I know it's not going to happen. They do not welcome me, for it seems that I have spoilt something by appearing in their lives; I have taken their friend away.

The problem is never stated or articulated, so Tim believes there isn't a problem. A couple of his close girlfriends clearly resent me, and in their position I might feel the same. It's obvious that they feel their importance to him will decrease. I can also see that one of them is attracted to him. She's playing Kristin Scott Thomas to his Hugh Grant in the unreciprocated love scene in *Four Weddings*. Unfortunately, that makes me Duckface.

Male friendships are different again — perhaps slightly less complicated, but they should not be underestimated as problem zones. "It is practically impossible for one friend not to mind when the other gets a serious partner," Roger Look, a clinical psychologist, says. "They know that to some extent they are being replaced, that the relationship is going to change, and that they will see a lot less of them."

This is why I feel so guilty. Because it is true, I have changed the nature of Tim's friendships. He and his best mate Mark used to be together all the time. Now Tim's with me. But instead of Mark being happy for him, he simply seems to resent it and feels that Tim has let him down.

According to Roger Look, although the new partner may feel bad there is very little he or she can do. "It's really up to the person who is already established in the group. There's a danger that if the new partner tries too hard to make friends, they come across as pushy. What you can do is try to establish that you're not a possessive person. If you're out with his friends, strike up conversations with other people; don't stay with your partner all night."

Tried that. Tried sitting at opposite ends of the pub table from Tim and ignoring him all night, in spite of the fact he's the only one I want to talk to. Tried to make conversations with his friends. Tried apologising to Mark for screwing up lifetime's friendship (bad move). Nothing seems to work, and instead I am beginning to resent their resentment. Tim's friends seem to think only of the effect our relationship is having on their lives, without realising that their friendship is beginning to affect our relationship.

A friend, Lucy, found a way of coping. She stopped seeing her partner's friends. Refused to go. They had all been at university together and she simply got sick of listening to anecdotes about people she didn't know, laughing at jokes she didn't understand, and being ignored for hours. She didn't like the situation, so she removed herself from it.

"It's not the worst way of coping," says Roger Look, "but the best way is to try and change the way you feel about it. Just because you may not be contributing much to the conversation, it doesn't mean that's a bad thing. And give your partner a break — he may be trying to steer the conversation round to things you know about, but the majority of the others probably haven't given it a thought."

He is right, of course, but these things do tend to spiral out of control. I know I should be tolerant and positive and believe that everything will be OK. But I think longingly of the evenings we spend with my friends, who are mostly in couples, and how easy it seems.

Back in publican, a horrible recollection occurs. It's Mark's birthday next week. Dinner, pub, silent discourse with a bottle of Diamond White. The same routine. Oh, stuff the positive attitude. To be honest, a couple of bottles of red with Lucy and an extended moaning session sounds a whole lot more enjoyable.



Shadow of grief: as a Jehovah's Witness, Hank Marvin believes he and his late son, Dean, will meet again. "We will all come back as ourselves. Otherwise how would we recognise each other?" Glyn Griffiths

## Specs, God and rock'n'roll

### Interview



**Deborah Ross**  
talks to  
**HANK MARVIN**

though he moved to Australia with his second wife and two further children a decade ago, Dean knew he could return to the family fold at any time. So what was Hank to do? Well, he could have arranged to help him financially, couldn't he? Yes, but what would have been the point? "He'd just spent it all on drink and drugs, wouldn't he?" he says despairingly.

The grief, he says, comes in these terrible waves. One moment he's making a cup of tea and the next — whoosh — grief hits him like a punch in the stomach. Could he have done more? Should he have done more? Were there errors more grievous than forgetting to send a birthday card? And it's not just me asking these questions. Hank asks them of himself, often. And always will.

**H**e has, of course, derived a great deal of comfort from his religion. As a Witness, he believes that, come the end of the world as we know it, Earth will be restored to perfection and all those who have died will come back to live the beautiful lives God always intended. Dean and Hank will meet again. He is sure of it. And they'll be able to recognise each other? Definitely, he insists, we will all come back as ourselves, "otherwise there wouldn't be any point. How would we recognise each other?"

Hank (and Cliff, of course) were always religious converts waiting to happen, as far as I can see. With them, it was never so much sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll as the occasional stolen kiss with Una Stubbs followed by a strawberry shake at a milk bar, then an early night curled up with *The Reader's Digest*, a periodical Hank still ranks as up there with *Awake*, one of the magazines of the Witness movement. "It's a very educational magazine, full of articles of geographical interest," he enthuses. He then recalls how Cliff once discovered a big cardboard box in his dressing room, and got very excited because he thought someone had sent him a television as a present. So when the box suddenly burst open and a girl jumped out, "Cliff was very disappointed. He'd have preferred a telly."

Cliff and Hank, a born-again Christian, disagree on most things when it comes to religion — "Oh yes, we've had some very

deep discussions in the past" — but they reluctantly remain pals. Cliff surprised him by turning up at the Albert Hall on his last tour and performing "Move It". And Hank is looking forward to seeing *Heathcliff* this week. Cliff, he reveals, "has wanted to play Heathcliff ever since he was 18. I admire him enormously for his tenacity and courage. He's had a lot of negative media coverage, I know. But I spoke to him the other night and he's thoroughly enjoying himself."

Hank Marvin can't, surely, have acquired a new fan in 30 years, but he is one of those people who goes inexorably on, and still notches up excellent record sales. His latest solo album, *Hank Plays Plays Live*, a video recording of his 1995 Birmingham Symphony Hall concert is released today. And, on Friday, he starts a 42-date nationwide tour. Yes, he'll be doing "Apache" and "Summer Holiday". And "Move It"! It's expected.

What sort of people, I ask, attend his concerts these days? "Human beings," he retorts with an enormously pleased chuckle. He does, to be sure, have a very *Summer Holiday*, C&A sense of humour. Hank, how do you remember your mother as a child? "I don't remember my mother as a child. She was always grown up to me." More chuckles, tee-hee, and what a laugh on tour buses they must all have.

Hank grew up in a terraced house in Newcastle with a concrete backyard, an outside toilet and a coal hole. His father, Joe, was a checker and loader with British Rail. Hank passed his 11-plus and went to the local grammar school, but he quickly got into music so his academic performance never came up to much. At 16, his father having given him a guitar for his birthday, he came to London with his equally guitar-obsessed school friend Bruce Welch, with whom he later formed The Shadows.

They were playing one day in a coffee bar in Soho when Cliff's manager, who was looking for a backing group, strolled in. "I remember being introduced to Cliff for the first time at the tailor's shop where he was being fitted with the bright pink jacket he was going to wear on stage," And then? "We all went back to his mother's council house in Cheshunt on a Green Line bus and rehearsed in his front room." As an anecdote, Hank can take something that should be very Versace and make it C&A, too. Later, he tells me: "On our days off, we would all go off to the cinema together with Cliff, self-consciously waiting until the lights went down before putting on his glasses, without which he couldn't see a thing." And: "Cliff had greasy hair and pimples back then, as we all did."

In the early Sixties, the Shadows and Cliff enjoyed great stardom, notching up hits after hit. In 1961, they played seven months at the London Palladium to 3,000 people every night. They had achieved 11 Top 10 entries, including five number ones, by 1963. Then came The Beatles; that should have been that — I knew from the first time I heard them they were going to be serious competition — but it wasn't. Sure, The Beatles ultimately forced Cliff and The Shadows to go their separate ways, but they did so with considerable success. Cliff went on to Eurovision and telly fame, while The Shadows retained their twang-a-long loving audiences. "Cliff had enormous appeal and an enormous following, while we had meaningful hits, independently with records like 'Apache'. And these things added up to longevity."

Hank became a Jehovah's Witness after the break-up of his first marriage to Billie, whom he married at 19 when she was pregnant with Dean. He was, he says, silly to get married when he did. At 19, what do you know? "Certainly, you haven't matured and aren't ready to shoulder responsibility. Although, of course, I didn't know that at the time. But I do remember seeing kids hanging round on street corners, having a good time, and thinking: How did I get locked into this situation?" They had three other children — a daughter and twin sons — whom he is still very close to, he says.

He became a Witness because he met a Witness on a tour and was impressed.

"He seemed to have standards he lived by, and that appealed to me." He started reading up on both the Witness movement and the Bible, "which I found fascinating, and so exciting". His parents got interested, too, and became Witnesses just before he did. Now, his wife and children are all Witnesses.

Now, this end of the world as we know it business; he truly believes in it, does he? Yes, absolutely. And when will the end come? Soon, he says, although he can't give any precise predictions. And meanwhile? He'll probably go on touring and being an engagingly unworldly as ever.

Hank, I ask at one point, when did you first realise you had made it? Well, Hank replies, it wasn't actually until a couple of years ago when he found himself listed in a dictionary of rhyming slang. Blimey, I gasp before I can stop myself. He looks at me perplexed, with those large, wet eyes blinking quizzically behind the big glasses. "No, they say: 'I'm Hank Marvin ... I'm starving.' Then, with a mixture of alarm and puzzlement, he asks: 'Why would anyone want to go for a Hank?'

Should Hank ever knock on your door, it's probably best not to mention the rhyming-slang business. But if you do, please don't then go on to make inquiries about his real name, the one he was born with. Which is? Brian Rankin, as it happens.

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Creditors of the company are requested to send details in writing of their claim against the company to the liquidator at the above address.

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David 10th March 1997  
David Phillips  
Liquidator

Julia Prince  
Associate of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

### Legal Notices

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At an extraordinary general meeting of Perham Securities Limited held at the office of Messrs. Maitz and Wolf, 169, Finsbury Square, London EC2M 7EP on 6th March 1997 at 2pm the following extraordinary resolution was passed:

That the company cannot be wound up voluntarily.

That the company be wound up voluntarily.

Chairman of the meeting

Julia Prince  
Associate of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

## the leader page

# A televised debate gets the people's vote

At last the brilliance of John Major's tactics is revealed. Now the campaign is under way, the wisdom of not calling the election last October is clear for all to see. The delay has given time for the feel-good factor to take hold, so that the gap in the opinion polls, in turn, had time to close. Not to mention the fact that the Government had a lot of important business to transact and measures to put on the statute book. Not everyone can remember what they were. But never mind: the past five months have given the Conservatives the chance to demonstrate their unity and renewed sense of purpose, while exposing the weaknesses of "new" Labour. All topped by the master-stroke: pressing bravely ahead with the Wirral South by-election, a move designed to give the final fillip to party morale before setting off on the campaign proper.

From this Conservative College of Political Strategy comes another wheeze, precisely designed to set the campaign off with a positive bang: a challenge from the Prime Minister to engage the opposition leader in a televised debate.

All right, enough of the wittiness irony. A debate might genuinely do Mr Major some good, even if it is a strange and possibly unconvincing offer to make, when the legal requirements on the broadcasters to maintain balance in their coverage of elections are well-known, and the Prime Minister refuses to let Paddy Ashdown into the studio.

Whether or not Mr Major's offer is sincere, a live television debate is one of the few American political imports that should be welcomed open-armed on these shores. Millions of American citizens watch their presidential debates, which are usually hour-long, serious affairs, helping to counter a television culture that is otherwise often justly derided for its triviality and its viewers' short attention span. People watch them for mixed reasons, with bloodclustering entertainment counting at least as high as civic responsibility. Debates are remembered afterwards for the superficialities and the sound bites: Nixon's sweat; the hypothetical rape of Dukakis's wife; "Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine". But they do deal with matters of substance, because the leaders cannot get away with less. And they draw people into the democratic process more than anything else could. They are, in fact, a fine way to reclaim the old 19th-century hustings – which were rather rowdier affairs than any television debate is likely to be.

A British debate would not be a mere exchange of sound bites, it would be a sound banquet. It would provide urgently needed relief from 20-second excerpts on news bulletins and edited speeches on late-night programmes marked as suitable for anoraks only. In a debate Mr Major's attempt to dismiss Mr Blair as a sound-bite politician would fail. The Labour leader has shown, every time talks to party members, busi-

ness leaders and the public, that there is more to him than that. He can do slogans and one-liners very well, but he can do the other stuff too. On the few occasions in the Commons that he has engaged with the Prime Minister outside the constraints of Prime Minister's Questions, Mr Blair has been a formidable debater. The pair would give each other at least as good as they get.

But a debate is not just about a contest of debating skills. It is a clash of values. There are important differences between Labour and the Tories on unemployment, Europe and our system of government. And there are other

critical issues in danger of being ignored in the election campaign, which a debate could open up. At the start of the year, *The Independent* set out the eight questions we were afraid would not be asked, let alone answered, in the election campaign. Now, as Mr Major gets out the A-Z and looks up Birmingham Palace, we still do not know if Mr Blair will back voting reform. Would Labour take Britain into the single currency? Why won't Labour match the Tory pledge to maintain NHS spending? What does any party mean by radical reform of the welfare state? A debate, or series of debates, could

prevent several awkward issues being closed down. But the difficult questions are much more likely to be asked if Mr Ashdown takes part. His position in British politics is much more significant than Ross Perot's in America. His party won nearly one in every five votes cast at the last election and is more important in local government than the Conservatives.

As for Tory spin doctors complaining that Mr Ashdown and Mr Blair would be "two against one", this shows both a yellow streak and an ignorance of Liberal Democrat positioning. If Mr Ashdown did appear to gang up with Mr Blair, it would scare a lot of soft Lib Dem voters back into the blue corner on election day. Mr Ashdown would be bound to adopt the "Reasonable Man" approach of siding with Mr Blair on some things (constitutional change) while giving him a hard time on others (education spending).

So it is now up to the broadcasters to devise a format which gives Mr Ashdown less prominence in the debate and squeezes the Prime Minister between shouts of "Chicken!" and the threat of Lib-Dem legal action into making good his promise. Once that is settled, let us have a debate between Kenneth Clarke and Gordon Brown too. Let us clarify some of the loose ends of Mr Brown's five-year pledge not to raise income-tax rates and his two-year pledge to stick to Tory spending limits. It was not clear

yesterday, for example, what his position is on National Insurance contributions, which are an income tax by another name.

People would turn on for Clarke v Brown, a heavyweight contest if ever there were one. And there is an edge of personal dislike which makes Major v Blair intrinsically watchable – the most important justification for televised debates. They would let the voters in on a campaign which too often seems to be going on, muffled, behind the television screen. Let us give the election back to the people.

## The way we were, more's the pity

The only thing to look forward to, as someone once said, is the past. The Co-op has brought back the driv. Now of course it is called a supermarket loyalty scheme. The police are bringing back their whistles. No doubt they will be called communication and audible alert devices. Competition has even brought the return of red telephone boxes, although they are not quite what they were. And Alan Clark is coming back into parliament. Although he presumably will be called exactly the same as before. In other words, a reactionary toff.



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Hours cut for doctors spells hospital ruin

Sir: Articles by Jack O'Sullivan ("Prognosis is grim for the NHS", 7 March) and Polly Toynbee ("No promises to keep the NHS fully funded", 13 March) dealt with the problems of the National Health Service, the pressures on it which are increasing expenditure, and the fact that both the main political parties are outdoing each other in insisting that they will not increase its funding. However, there is one major influence which all articles in the press seem to miss, namely the effects of the New Deal on Junior Doctors' Hours.

In the part of a district general hospital which I manage, the item of expenditure which has increased far more than any other is nothing to do with technology or an aging population: it is simply the fact that junior doctors are working shorter hours. For years they worked 100-hour weeks with "additional duty hours" – those above 40 hours a week – paid at half time (the very opposite of the concept of overtime). Now they can only be contracted to work for 72 hours, which means we need more doctors and more money to pay them.

From an individual hospital's point of view, most of this is externally financed, but it still comes out of the total NHS coffers. However, even within the hospital it still has a marked adverse effect on our budgets, because we have to be careful that hours are not exceeded when doctors are taken sick or go on leave. Thus the cost of locums, and business for the locum agencies, has rocketed in the last three years.

This is not a one-off increase which will now stabilise. The process is continuing. Soon doctors will be allowed to work no more than 56 hours, and the Maastricht Treaty will reduce them even further to 48 hours. This will be coupled with the effects of the Calman report on training doctors which is just beginning to bite. Under this, junior doctors are there to be trained, not to provide the backbone of the service, particularly out of hours, which is what they have been doing, until now.

For very good reasons, the Government, under the influence of Europe, has set off a train of events but does not seem to have the faintest idea where it all lead. Not only will it result in a drastic increase in costs, it will result in the closure of many smaller hospitals because they will not have sufficient doctors in the same speciality to sustain on-call rota and provide teaching.

If the issue of training and deployment of doctors is not addressed in a context which takes into account the impact on the rest of the NHS, it will be overwhelmed by forces that will very quickly get out of control.

W. ALEXANDER  
Redhill, Surrey

### Albania reverts to old habits

Sir: Andrew Gumbel ("God save us, God save Albania", 14 March) is right to point out how the polarisation of opinion between "left" and "right" among British commentators is confusing policy towards the current emergency in Albania. Unfortunately, political position-taking is also making it all the harder to interpret current developments.



### Nursery scheme bound to fail

Sir: It has been interesting watching the Government trying to distract attention from the failings of its nursery voucher scheme ("Tories scorn Major's nursery revolution", 13 March). It heaps opprobrium on the local education authorities, accusing them of bribery and blackmail to encourage parents to use those vouchers in their schools.

This government put education into the market place. It is ironic that it now bemoans attempts by schools and local authorities to ensure that as many nursery vouchers as possible are used in schools rather than in the private and voluntary sectors.

The preferred option is for four-year-olds to be in properly resourced and staffed nursery schools and classes. Those admitted to reception classes will benefit from being in an educational environment and avoiding the instability which comes from having to change institutions at a later stage.

Schools which have been starved of resources did not create the market, which is now the only means of easing the under-funding inflicted on them by the Government.

DOUG MC AVOY  
General Secretary  
National Union of Teachers  
London WC1

### Abattoir animals deserve better

Sir: In all the furor over the BSE and *E. coli* crises, little account seems to have been taken of the welfare of the animals involved.

In his excellent piece "Passing the buck can be fatal" (11 March), Andreas Whitman Smith mentions that it was a ruling of the Ministry of Agriculture itself which led to the animals suffering such stress when they arrive at the abattoirs. He didn't mention what this ruling was – and I doubt that the ministry will tell me!

Surely the animals that are bred for our food deserve at least a decent life and an unstressful death – and if they are not granted this, we, the public, ought to know the conditions they suffer and have the option to decide not to eat meat. I have done this, and refuse to buy any other than organic meat for those in my family who still eat it.

FRANCES HARDWICK  
Pinner, Middlesex

### Sir George's hip taste in music

Sir: I loved David Aaronovitch's article on Sir George Gardiner ("Til Death do us part", 14 March). As his son, I wish bids it were true: Ken Clarke may like jazz, but rather than attending funerals, Sir George listens to Guns N'Roses, Rainbow and Tina Turner full blast. Oh for the serenity of a funeral march!

ALEXANDER GARDINER  
London E8

Sir: David Aaronovitch's word-paintings of House Members are always a delight but Sir George Gardiner would have presented an even more surprising spectacle to the House had his trousers truly been covering his humeri.

BARBARA BROWN  
London N13

Albanian politics cannot be understood in simple West European terms of left versus right. Much of what masquerades as politics in Albania is instead informed by clientage, personal allegiance and clan affiliation, all of which cut through conventional ideological positions. These loyalties are often reinforced by business and criminal connections.

On top of this, Albanian society has never recognised a distinction between public and private spheres. Public offices have therefore been perceived as private perquisites, to be plundered at the beneficiary's will. In this respect, there has been little difference in attitudes between the inter-war Zogist, the post-war Stalinist and the current Berisha regimes.

After 1945, Albania experienced decades of harsh Communist rule under which political power was understood to be the private possession of a small governing élite. Over the last few years, the successor governments have found it increasingly hard to maintain Stalinist levels of coercion, and have gradually had to relinquish power over the society they inherited.

More recently, the ruling Democrat Party has been entirely discredited as a consequence of the failure of the pyramids in which it is widely believed to have been a major stakeholder. With the contraction of the state and the damage done to its already tenuous legitimacy, Albanian society has begun to revert to its historic, pre-modern form.

Albania is now dissolving into the condition in which it entered the twentieth century: riven by faction, clan and blood feud, and divided by regionalism, custom and dialect. Categories of "left" and

### Be fair to private homes for elderly

Sir: Polly Toynbee's article "An inspector calls on privatised care" (3 March) includes several interesting and pertinent points, but taken together they are assumed to prove that private homes are of a poor standard and run purely for the financial benefit of the owners. This view is both prejudicial and inaccurate.

The vast majority of private residential homes for the elderly represent high standards of care and good value for money. We entirely agree the need for adequate (and unannounced) inspections. High standards of care can be achieved without uniformity of practice and provision. This is one of the strengths of the private sector.

The local authority is presently responsible for inspecting all private provision. In some areas authorities have recently been forced to close some of their own homes, since these must now be inspected to the same standard and they are unable to bring their homes up to our required level. It is quite unacceptable for inspection units to be as poorly staffed as those which Ms Toynbee quotes.

Any member of the public who faces the difficult decision to place an elderly relative in a home would be ill-advised to use an unregistered home and should seek the guidance of their local Homes Association.

Places in private homes are

generally less expensive than those in local authority homes. This is due to the fact that the owners/proprietors are personally involved in the running of the home and there is a saving on bureaucratic management.

The owners are not over-renumerated. Whether we are social workers paid through taxes or proprietors paid directly by our clients, the money has to be found by the public, and we all share the same altruistic motives.

The principle of "Care in the Community" must be applauded, but it is often used as an opportunity to save money when the care needed is not available. Choice must indeed be offered, but this is frequently denied to those who wish to be relieved of the responsibility, loneliness and fear of living alone.

Miss L. H. MEERS  
Chairman  
Registered Care Homes Association  
(Hereford & Worcester)  
Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire

Sir: Warning bells rang when I read that Stephen Dorrell's White Paper was proposing to privatise council homes for the elderly (report, 10 March).

My husband has Alzheimer's disease. All the literature recommends that it is best for both sufferer and family if respite care can be found in a home where eventually it can turn, almost imperceptibly, into permanent care. A person with dementia can still sense the "feel" of a familiar place – and continuity is vital. With

regular breaks, we carers can continue to plod on, caring at home, each of us saving the health service thousands of pounds a year. Social services recognise this and earmark beds in council-run homes for emergency or planned respite care.

In the private sector, however, decisions are financed. For example, I was delighted to find that a new and attractive home (which has already worked closely with the local mental hospital to take some long-stay patients) had a number of beds allocated to early-onset dementia. Delighted, that is, until I was told: "Sorry, no respite care beds available." Why? They are a financial risk. All beds need to be occupied all the time to make a profit.

So with the health service already cutting down on its respite care provision, and Mr Dorrell lining up social services and the homes they run for privatisation, who will safeguard the interests of patients not yet ready for continuing care – and of their carers, desperate for some respite?

BARBARA POINTON  
Thriplow, Cambridgeshire

### 70 years a lord

Sir: Whilst the Earl of Listowel's service in the House of Lords was lengthy (obituary, 13 March), he was not actually the longest-serving member of the House. That distinction is held by the 4th Lord Oranmore and Browne, sitting by virtue of his UK peerage of Lord Mereworth. He took his seat after the death of his father in 1927, and is thus the effective "Father of the House" in the upper chamber.

MATTHEW SEWARD  
London SW19

## The Tory underdog should be put out of its misery

**Anthony Bevins**  
talks to Tony Blair about John Major's new election strategy

**T**he brass neck of John Major saying that he is moving the Conservative revolution into a new phase, in which the next Parliament would turn its attention to the have-nots and the inner cities, is only matched by the Tory attempt to portray themselves as the underdogs of the coming election.

After 18 years in office, the party chairman Brian Mawhinney, told the Conservative Central Council meeting in Bath on Friday: "The Conservative Party is running behind. We are not coasting to victory." But he then added: "Underdogs win just as often as favourites."

The dramatic switch in Conservative tactics comes as a reaction to Conservative soundings showing that they have lost touch and sympathy with a great swathe of the electorate. The voters apparently believe that the Tories have created a divided society, and that the people who have been turned into an underclass now pose a threat to the stability of the community at large. Mr Major recognises, at last, that something needs to be done for them too; not so much a trickle-down of crumbs from the tables of the rich, but a trickle up of security for the whole of society.

"Dignity, security, prosperity, must walk down every street in the land," he said in his Bath speech on Saturday. "And that must include the inner cities, to which we will turn our attention in the next Conservative Parliament."

But as Mr Blair says in an exclusive interview with *The Independent*, it is a little too late for the Conservatives now, to be turning their attention to the have-nots.

"They have spent 18 years," says the Labour leader, "creating a divided society in which a few people at the top have done extremely well; a majority are working harder to stand still; and a substantial minority have seen poverty and unemployment grow. One in five households of non-pensionable age have no wage earner at all and three million children live in families dependent on Income Support."

### They think they have a divine right to rule

Mr Blair says that a month before the last election, in 1992, the Prime Minister himself had accepted that poverty should be measured by the level of Income Support. "The number on Income Support has actually risen by nearly a million since 1992, never mind 1979," says the Labour leader.

"It's not just equality of income, either. There's educational inequality, too. Nearly half of 11-year-olds failed to reach the expected standard of maths and English. A lot of people leave school now without any proper qualification at all. There's a decline in the level of apprenticeships."

"There's also inequality in health; look at the mortality rates between the wealthier and the poorer. And, of course, crime is a bigger problem in the poorer areas."

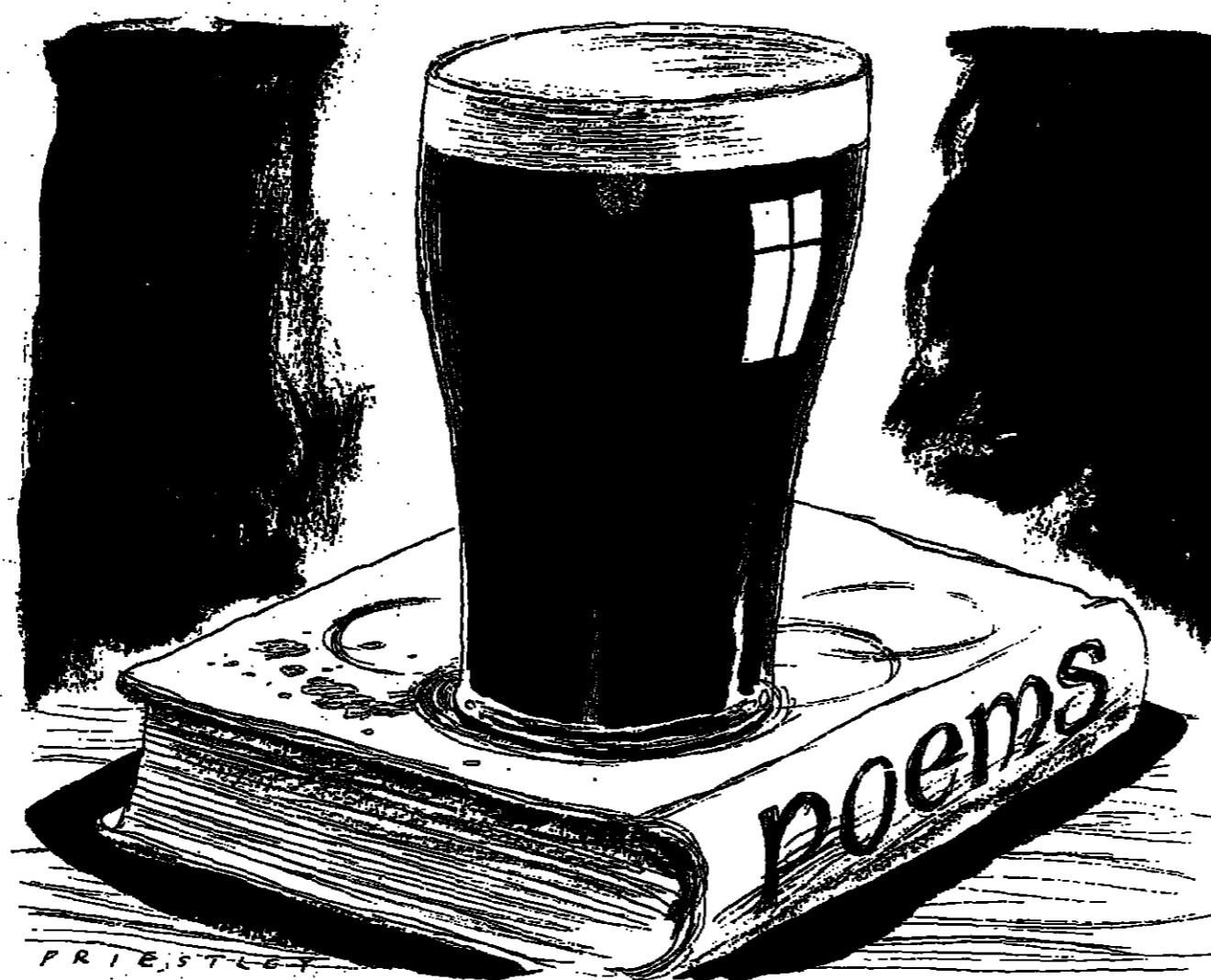
As for the idea that the Conservatives could even try to portray themselves as the underdogs of the election campaign, the Labour leader says: "The fact is that they have been the party of power for 18 years. The idea that they can come along now and say people should feel sorry for them is really bewildering. What is bewildering is the degree to which they are completely out of touch and don't understand people are fed up with them, when they are planning to privatisate social services. They are still saying they are going to win. I think they do think they have a divine right to rule."

The Conservatives, in spite of their ploy to paint themselves as the underdogs, are, however, fighting the current campaign to the utmost of their ability and energy. If they are going to go down, they are going to go down fighting.

Although televised debates would grab headlines, Mr Major and Mr Blair are more interested in grabbing hands, getting votes, and going out on to the streets to talk directly to the voters who will swing the election result. While media broadcasts will play a large part in the campaign, larger than ever before, all party leaders will be addressing the regions and regional issues with tours and meetings out in the sticks – away from the metropolitan bias of Westminster.

Mr Blair says: "This campaign is not going to be some presidential exchange. It's got to be about the real questions that concern people ... We will be out very much with the people, talking about the things that matter to them, as we've been doing for the last nine months. I've done question and answer sessions all round the country, and I will carry on doing so."

Neither Mr Major nor Mr Blair believe the election result is in the bag. They both discount the opinion polls. Each believes the six-week election campaign is still there to be won or lost.



## Poetry in the land of Saint Patrick

**Ruth Padel sees appreciation in Ireland and blinkers in Britain**

**T**wo St Patrick's Days ago, marooned by snow at Pittsburgh Airport, I landed at a hotel smothered in emerald banners, leprechauns behind every hydrangea. A tape played relentlessly through breakfast. "Everybody's Irish on St Patrick's Day ... Everybody's Irish on St Patrick's Day." If I'd been Irish, I'd have squirmed behind hydrangea-level. This year I'm in Ireland itself. The Duke of Ormond built Butler House, Kilkenny, as a dower house, to get his mother out of the castle. From her bedroom, she could gaze at the turrets that excluded her. This spring, Butler House Hotel has hosted a series of talks on cultural exchange. I'm here to read my poems and talk about how Brits (unlike the Pittsburghians) can feel excluded from Irishness, and why.

A reporter interviews me. "How can you read that stuff in public?" he demands, about a love poem of mine. Once you've written it, you have to trust how a poem's made, I say. That's what matters. Its shape.

He reacts as if I'd disembowelled his Cocker Spaniel. "I felt it was mine," he says, "that poem. It was about me and my girlfriend." "Of course it's about feeling," I falter. "And – er – sex. But I think you remember it because of how it's made." I've disappointed him. What a beast. Great intro to my talk.

I tell the audience most British people have no idea of events which make up the Republic's idea of "Britishness".

"School didn't tell me Cromwell came to Ireland. He was the British civil war." (Shocked laughter; it's like saying you never knew Hitler didn't like Jews.) I punctuate my pearls of explanation with poems. The one my interviewer bonded with. One about a British village which buried its stained glass in the river, to save it from Cromwell. Tonight all my poems are about the misuse of power. How come I never noticed?

Questions. "When Britain loses Hong Kong, will it forget dreams of empire?" Sorry, that one's unfadeable. The only hope is education, but there's not much of that around. I say again, in Britain just now.

The audience is kind (probably sorry for me). "Don't you like Britain?" They buy all my books. I feel rich; and unexcluded.

Next day the Arts Education Officer shows me the Cathedral. Cromwell managed a spot of glass-smashing here when he stabled his troopers in the church. "We weren't smart enough to bury it," says Priscilla.

Kilkenny follows me to Dublin: I found the new drink here is red ale. (Ask for

"a Kilkenny"). The poet Matthew Sweeney has been doing poetry workshops at "The Ark", a Cultural Centre for Children in Temple Bar, Dublin's Rive Gauche.

Matthew shows me Wilhelma the wooden tortoise. When you pull her head you find a secret drawer, containing her account of travels with Noah. Wilhelma remembers mammoths, apparently, but looks forward to the future: rainbows at the end of her story; a play lesson in memory and survival.

Matthew also shows me the Poetry Trees. The Nonsense Tree has flowers you unhook with poems at their centre in mirror-writing. Hold your flower to a mirror, read your poem right-way-round, then hook it back. The Heaney Tree is a pen (Remember his poem "Digging"?). Each ink-blue leaf is a famous poem. The apples on the Irish Tree are pierced with "maggots": parchment rolls inscribed with Gaelic poems. The Faraway Tree is a globe, a poem in each country.

"There should be one of these in London," says Matthew mournfully. We try to imagine. "There wouldn't be funding even to keep the lavatories clean," I say. "The poems'd get lost."

### Dubliners get restive without a daily poem

Anyone can book children a workshop at the Ark. Here it is, the real thing: imagination, fun, a sense of the past. Secret drawers, optimism, creativity. In other words, education. Alive, full of poems and domiciled in Dublin, a city where Poems on the Dart (Dublin's Poems on the Underground) has been forcibly reinstated because Dubliners get restive without a daily poem. Poems on the Dart is now called Poets' Corner, which means dead poets, doesn't it, in London? And dead poets are in, over at the British Council.

The Council has always sent live poets abroad before, as its cultural ambassadors. I remember reading with Elaine Feinstein and Palestinian poets in Nazareth. Elaine (who's Jewish) read a Marina Tsvetaeva translation and sketched Marina's political persecution and personal agony in Russia. We all discussed how you mix political injustice with personal experience in a formal tradition like Arabic poetry or an individualistic one like ours. The discussion was electric. I learned a lot. Didn't you like a change from Britishness?

Poetry, education and red ale in Ireland this spring. Kilkenny Arts Education 00-353-56-65103. Pam Ayres. Poetry Reading 27 March: Watergate Theatre, Kilkenny; 00-353-56-61674. Butler House, Kilkenny; 00-353-56-65707. Ark Children's Centre, Dublin; 00-253-1-670-7788. Cúirt Festival of Literature, Galway, 15-20 April; 00-353-91-565886.

## Give a whistle for the old street sounds

**Jack O'Sullivan applauds the police for shooting from the lip**

**T**he news that police officers are to be reissued with their whistles will be music to the ears of many. Symbolising the return of the friendly hobby on the beat, it is a relief that someone, at last, will blow the whistle on those who drop litter, foul the footpath and hog the road – offences for which the walkie-talkie Robocop is ill-equipped. Like referees and schoolteachers (who generally opt for the model with a pea in it rather than the constabulary's tubular version), police officers have at last recognised the effectiveness of the short, sharp blast.

The initiative, being pioneered in the Kent towns of Ramsgate, Margate and Broadstairs, may also restore the lost confidence of those, like myself, who love nothing more than to form a perfect O with our lips and cheer everyone up with a tune. After all, the most famous whistling on the police series *Dixon of Dock Green*, was achieved without any mechanical assistance.

I have often wondered where my fellow whistlers have gone. Have they been shamed into silence by the wolf whistlers who deride our art? Have they perhaps given up trying because the demands of modern pop (try doing the Spice Girls' *Wannabe*) are so much greater than the melodies of Cole Porter and Frank Sinatra?

Yet there is a fine tradition to be reclaimed. We whistlers were once the great romantics; remember the steamy scene in which Lauren Bacall, in her 1944 movie *To Have and Have Not*, tempted Humphrey Bogart with the drawled line, "If you want me, just

whistle." And then there was Jiminy Cricket, guardian angel to Pinocchio, whose advice to his charge was, when in trouble, "Give a little whistle." Sadly, which of us today still enlivens our daily toil by whistling, like the seven dwarves, while we work?

The demise of the whistler – condemned as out of tune and drowned out by the juggernaut – is just one barely noticed part of our fast-disappearing aural environment. Who now gives a second thought to that once familiar "der-der-der" of ambulances, police cars and fire engines as they went about their business? Instead we suffer the wailing of sirens imported from New York's

streets. And what about chatting at bus stops? All we have today is sullen silence. Yet, if we can bring back the whistle, then couldn't those electronic countdowns at bus stops encourage the queue with today's topic for talk? How about, "Isn't the weather awful?" or, on Friday nights, "Thank God it's the weekend."

And why stop there? Let's bring the cacophony of the past back. Can't we reinforce the clinking gold tops and humming float of the endangered milkman with the chorus cries of the muffin man, the rag-and-bone-man and the scrap-metal merchant? What about the now silenced grunts of the evening newspaper sellers? We could have them back too. Who knows, if this latest police initiative really caught the imagination and the old echoes of Britain's neighbourhoods returned *forrissimo*, we might even hear again that loveliest of lost sounds – children playing in the street.



## The great debate: Just a Minute v Behaving Badly

**T**he news that John Major and Tony Blair may stage a televised public debate by all those who will be out of the country at the time. However, if such a debate does take place, it's very hard to see what the best format would be. There will have to be rules of some kind, otherwise one man will go on talking as long as he can. There will have to be some kind of entertainment factor, otherwise nobody will watch. And there should be some kind of scoring element, otherwise nobody will know who has won.

This rules out the format normally employed by these two, the prime minister's question time format, which produces no entertainment, no winners and, oddly, no answers. A TV debate along those lines would only go like this:

Blair: May I put it to you that under the Tory government the educational system of this country has gone from bad to worse?

Major: I refer my opponent to the reply I gave a few moments ago.

Blair: I am afraid that is not good enough. The only original thing this government has done in the field of education is to issue league tables at regular intervals which prove nothing except that some schools tend to be better than others. What they do not show is that we are slipping further and further down the international league table!

Major: This comes very well from a party whose educational record when it was in power was appalling. Was it not James Callaghan himself who said ... ?

Yes, I think Rule Number One would have to be that neither side could quote past performances, at least not more than five years old. I think an audience would be permissible, as long as the performers were not allowed to make rabbble-rousing statements to get automatic applause, in the manner of panelists on *Any Questions?*. A better format – if we are to have rules and scoring – would be that of *Just a Minute*, so that proceedings would go something like this:

Chairman: Right. John Major, your turn, so you can speak for 60 seconds without hesitation.

Blair: There should be oodles of it – all those things you've been selling off – trains, water, arms to Iraq ... What's the money?

Major: I think Ken's got it.

Blair: Incidentally, there was a phone call for you. From a girl.

Major: Good!

Blair: No, it's not. It was from Margaret.

Mmm. Not sure I've got it right yet. But it's better than the real thing already, I think.

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## obituaries / gazette

# Fred Zinnemann

The critical establishment has always had a tendency, especially where the cinema is concerned, to judge brows and classes in tandem, with a fair amount of indulgence for the extremes of both high and low, but contempt for the dreaded middle. If, thus, Fred Zinnemann's stock as a director has fallen of late, it is because, during the 16 years of his heyday, a period stretching from *The Men* in 1950 to *A Man For All Seasons* in 1966, his career sought to demonstrate above all the importance of earnestness, that quintessential middlebrow and middle-class virtue.

His work was distinguished by the one unfashionably high-minded attribute of which "the movies" have ever been, or perceived to have been, bereft – a hyperactive (and on occasion self-egarding) social conscience. And even when, rarely, he made a movie movie – the western *High Noon*, the musical comedy *Oklahoma!* – he seemed temperamentally incapable of exulting in the simple,



Zinnemann: moral gravitas

Photograph: Camera Press

incurable poetry of generic myths and conventions, of either cunningly or gruffly transcending those conventions from within in the manner of Hitchcock, Hawks or Ford. What concerned him, rather, was the degree to which their sometimes resistant themes and textures would lend themselves to the moral gravitas of his trademark brand of humanistic editorialising.

In consequence, he was for several years, along with William Wyler and George Stevens, one of the three token "intellectuals" of the Hollywood industry, which predictably rewarded his conspicuous seriousness and sincerity with a bouquet of Oscars. Later, however, he was totally, mortifyingly, ignored by "the French" in the Sixties when the Auteur Theory became the dominant methodology of film criticism, a reversal of fortune from which his reputation was never afterwards to recover. Certainly,

whatever the term *auteur* has come to mean in a cinematic context, it is difficult to apply to the sober-sided, often impersonal Zinnemann, whose films are definable less by their essence – that is, by the virtual absence of those qualities (and, to be fair, flaws) that characterise the output of Hitchcock, Hawks, Ford, Lang, Minnelli, Sternberg and their like in the auteurist Pantheon.

With Zinnemann, it was the subject not the style that made the man; visually, his work tended to be flat and academic, if always very competent. And it was not by chance that his affinities lay with a stolidly middle-brow range of literary blockbusters: *The Seventh Cross* (Anna Seghers), *From Here to Eternity* (James Jones), *A Haif of Rain* (Michael G. Gazzo), *The Nun's Story* (Kathryn C. Hulme), *The Sundowners* (Jon Cleary), *A Man for All Seasons* (Robert Bolt) and, arguably, *Jubilee* (Lillian Hellman). Indeed, a typical film by Zinnemann resembled nothing so much as one of those well-intentioned, exhaustively researched slabs of fiction (by such writers as James Michener, Irwin Shaw, Herman Wouk and Leon Uris) of which Gore Vidal once caustically remarked that they were fine in every respect except as literature.

Zinnemann was born in 1907 in Vienna, the son of a prominent Jewish physician. Although he early planned to become a lawyer, his profession was determined by three films that he saw in his youth – Stroheim's *Greed*, King Vidor's *The Big Parade* and Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. So, after graduating from university, he left his native city to become an assistant cameraman in Berlin, where, in the company of such future Hollywood film-makers as Robert Siodmak, Billy Wilder and Edgar G. Ulmer, he would collaborate on a celebrated documentary, more honoured by movie buffs in the breach than in the observance, *Menschen am Sonntag* (1929). *People on Sunday*.

In 1939, he emigrated to Hollywood where, in the following year, he was hired as an extra on Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. He assisted, in various capacities, the directors Berthold Vieret, Robert Flaherty (on an abortive documentary project which was to have been filmed in the Soviet Union) and, at least according to his curriculum vitae, Busby Berkeley on the deliriously campy production numbers of an Eddie Cantor musical, *The Kid from Spain*. Finally, in 1935, he was accorded

co-director status with the documentarist Paul Strand on *Redes* (or *The Wave*).

Following years of ploughing some of the less fertile fields of the Hollywood backlot – three short-film series, *Crime Does Not Pay*, *Pete Smith Specialities* and *Historical Mysteries*, as well as a few routine, now forgotten B-movies – Zinnemann eventually established a name for himself in 1948 with *The Search*, a duly "sensitive" if already somewhat programmatic melodrama of the growing friendship between a GI (Montgomery Clift) and a young concentration camp survivor.

Thereafter, an acknowledged Hollywood heavyweight, he would never descend to churning out one film after another, but would meticulously select and prepare his material (vainly struggling for several years, for example, to adapt André Malraux's *La Condition humaine* to the screen), frequently having to battle with the fabled front office to preserve what he saw as the integrity of his vision.

In an era when the greatest

Hollywood directors – Ford, Capra, Vidor, etc – were politically conservative and even reactionary, Zinnemann was a liberal humanist and a social (if not quite "socialist") realist, with a natural inclination to addressing the burning issues of the day: disability (*The Men*, in which Marlon Brando gave an extraordinary performance as a paraplegic); Zinnemann was unquestionably a major director of actors and possibly envisioned the direction of actors as the film-maker's primary vocation); anti-Semitism (*From Here to Eternity*, 1953, *Julia*, 1977); heroin addiction (*A Haif of Rain*, 1957); the religious calling (*The Nun's Story*, 1959); and, supremely, to the point where it might be regarded as a personal thematics, the sort of conflict of conscience that permits heroic individualism to emerge from a context of moral cowardice (*High Noon*, 1952, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Julia* and *People on Sunday*).

If, paradoxically, his finest production – a remarkably faithful and uncannily well-cast adaptation of Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1953, with Julie Harris, Ethel Waters and Brandon de Wilde) – conforms not at all to his public image, the most famous of his films, *High Noon*, was widely read as a courageous allegory of the McCarthy era witch-hunts. Yet even *High Noon*, although once universally admired, has had its detractors. It was the time-consuming and ultimately counterproductive search for help by its lawman

protagonist (Gary Cooper) that prompted an exasperated Howard Hawks to make *Rio Bravo*, a western that is now generally considered to be superior on every level; and Zinnemann's pseudo-Aristotelian pretensions to "real time" were punctured in an ingenious article by the British critic Richard Combs.

*High Noon* may be Zinnemann's best-loved film, but the most vividly remembered single sequence in his entire oeuvre is without doubt the sexy, wetly glistening encounter on a

Hawaiian beach between Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr in *From Here to Eternity*, a scene which set the style in romantic soft-core eroticism for many years to come and became (as numerous parodies bear witness) the cinematic equivalent of a well-thumbed page in some slightly risqué best-seller.

Gilbert Adair

*Frederick Zinnemann, film director: born Vienna 29 April 1907; married 1936 Renée Bartlett (one son); died London 14 March 1997.*



Sexy and wetly glistening: Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr meet on the beach in Zinnemann's *From Here to Eternity*, 1953

## Pierre Comiti

The profession of bodyguard is dangerous, but it is fascinating. The guards live in an enforced intimacy with those whom they are guarding: they see and hear much that is unknown to other mortals. As bodyguard to the French president General Charles de Gaulle for many years, Paul Comiti was an outstanding member of the profession and innumerable journeys with de Gaulle, official visits and walkabouts, assassination attempts and rumours of violence meant that he had a vast experience.

The fact that Comiti had at one time worked for the Messageries de la Presse meant that he got on well with journalists and was ready to talk to them. He was a great source of anecdotes. Sitting in the front of the presidential car, next to the driver, he could hear de Gaulle's conversation. He found it particularly amusing when, on dramatic occasions or on route for some ceremony, the General would be discussing literature, reminiscing or encouraging a companion to gossip, when to the world outside, the most serious conversations were taking place.

Comiti knew certain moments of achievement that went far beyond the ordinary duties of a bodyguard. In July 1967,

when de Gaulle visited Canada, the episode in Montreal was carefully planned. The mayor of Montreal had arranged that de Gaulle should make a short speech to invited guests inside the town hall. When de Gaulle said that he wished to speak to the crowd outside the mayor explained that this was impossible because, unfortunately, no microphone was available. At this point Comiti took the General by the arm and led him on to the balcony where he had assisted in the mysterious installation of a microphone. De Gaulle's "J'aime Québec Libre" speech followed.

In May 1968, when students were filling the streets of Paris with excited demonstrations, many Gaulists feared that power was slipping away from them. Therefore a counter-demonstration was planned. The headquarters of those who were organising this movement was the Service d'Action Civique, known as the SAC, a secret police which worked with the regular police. It was founded in 1960 and its president was Paul Comiti.

Working with Charles Pasqua (later the interior minister in 1983), a vast organisation was set up and the counter-demonstration planned for 30 May. The General was per-

suaded to bring forward a broadcast planned for 8pm to 4.30pm. It was with this knowledge that the President was in a fighting mood that more than half a million marched from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe. De Gaulle, they shouted, was not alone. In Paris, as in Montreal, Comiti played a vital role in a successful operation.

By birth a Corsican, Comiti entered the Resistance in 1940 and was imprisoned by the Vichy authorities in Beyrouth. He escaped and, disguised as a monk, made his way to join the

Free French. He served on warships, but at the Liberation ill-health made him leave the navy.

When de Gaulle founded his political party, the Rassemblement du Peuple Français (Rally of the French People), in 1947, he had difficulty in preventing his meetings from being broken up by Communists and others. He therefore called on former members of the Resistance to help him and Comiti joined up with Pierre Debizet in September 1947 as second-in-command of these redoubtable strong-arm men,

"les gorilles" as they were called.

It was natural that when de Gaulle became president in 1959 he should call on Comiti to be his chief bodyguard. After his death Comiti served with Georges Pompidou and as First Gentleman of France. He was an expert on his visits abroad. His loyalty was always to General de Gaulle, for whom, he said, he had been ready to die.

Douglas Johnson

*Paul Comiti, bodyguard: born Sotta, Corsica 30 November 1921; died Paris 5 March 1997.*

## ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

### Birthdays

Sir William Aldous, a Lord Justice of Appeal, 61; Mr Patrick Allen, actor, 70; Professor John Barnes, Egyptologist, 51; Mr Jeff Banks, fashion designer, 55; Sir Donald Barron, former chairman of the Midland Bank, 76; Mr Gavin Campbell, actor and television presenter, 51; Sir John Cheshire, consultant surgeon and Lord Mayor of London, 66; Mr Terry Dicks MP, Professor David Dilkis, Vice-Chancellor, Hull University, 60; Edmund Kean, actor, 1789; Mr Patrick Duffy, actor, 46; Mr Roger Evans MP, 56; Vice-Admiral Sir Donald Gibson, 81; Sir Arthur Hockley, former Secretary and Director-General, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 71; Professor George Hughes, zoologist, 72; Mr Robin Knox-Johnston, yach-

man, 58; The Earl of Lauderdale, former journalist and MP, 86; Professor Mark Lillie, concert pianist, 19; Mrs Penelope Lively, writer, 64; The Rev. Rev. Keith O'Brien, Roman Catholic Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, 59; Mr Tim Rathbone MP, 64; Sir Patrick Reilly, former diplomat, 58; Miss Galina Samosava, ballet dancer, 61; Mr Brian Sedgemoor, MP, 60; Dr David Stoddart-Clark, psychiatrist, 81; Mr Max Stafford-Clark, artistic director, 50; Joint Theatre Company, 56; Miss Lesley-Anne Down, actress, 42; Mr Patrick Duffy, actor, 46; Mr Roger Evans MP, 56; Vice-Admiral Sir Donald Gibson, 81; Sir Arthur

Hockley, former Secretary and Director-General, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 71; Professor George Hughes, zoologist, 72; Mr Robin Knox-Johnston, yach-

man's book illustrator, 15; Mr "Nai" King Cole (Nathaniel Adams Coates), singer and pianist, 19; Rudolf Hameirich Meyer, ballerina and director, 1926; Hanif Hareef, King of England, 1040; Jan van Mieris painter, 1690; Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, playwright and poet, 1741; Helen Hayes, actress, 1908. On this day the Duchy of Cornwall was created, 1337; Oliver Cromwell declared England to be a Commonwealth, abolishing the position of King, 1649; Captain Lawrence Oates, with Scott's expedition, walked out into the Antarctic wastes, never to return, 1912; Marie Stopes opened her first birth control clinic in London, 1921. Today is the Feast Day of St Patrick, the Patron of the Scapular, St Gertrude of Nivelles, St Joseph of Arimathea and St Paul of Cyprus.

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# New York's one-day dive offers consolation to long-term bears

At last the bears have had something to sink their teeth into. Last week New York suffered its sharpest slide of the year, sending the predictable ripples of unease through the stock market.

Yet Footsie's decline was far less dramatic, even before Wall Street recovered its nerve, than many thought likely. After Friday's recovery it had fallen mere 20 points from an all-time high of 4,444.3. Such a reaction would suggest the slump so many anticipate will be further delayed despite the looming election.

Record-breaking runs, of course, have to end some time. And many believe that the marathon bull market, the longest ever, is set to crack.

Tony Dye, the PDMF fund manager, has already staked his reputation and his clients' cash on a crash and may be growing increasingly embarrassed by the recent levels shares have achieved.

And David Schwartz, who describes himself as a stock market historian and has long been forecasting a bloodbath, says: "Given current stock market conditions, we believe the typical buy-and-hold investor is best off in a building society savings account."

In many City offices a strong opening for the year was predicted. Legal & General forecast Footsie reaching 4,400 points in the first quarter.

If the rest of the L&G forecast is correct the index will rise to 3,800, ending the year at 4,000.

NaWest Securities remains the City's arch-bull. It looks for a year-end level of 4,600.

Even so it is uncertain about the next few months, suggesting Footsie at 4,200 in May. Richard Jeffrey at Charterhouse Tilney, whilst shooting for 4,400 in the summer, sees a year-end 4,000. US investment house Goldman Sachs has a 12-month target of 4,250.

Bob Semple and David McBain, the NatWest strategists, believe that 5,000 is "not unthinkable over the next 12 months".

They add: "While we are unrepentant bulls for the year as a whole we are nervous that the market has run too far, too quickly in the short term and will be stopped in its tracks by either domestic political worries or a sell-off in the US bond market over the next few weeks".

Mr Schwartz is convinced past trends are signalling the next important move will be downwards. But times change and history has a habit of not repeating itself.

Still elections invariably settle equities. One of the big surprises this year has been the blustery indifference shares have so far displayed about the nation's trek to the polls.

But as the inevitable election draws closer the market should become more volatile.

## STOCK MARKET WEEK

### DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

And, as Mr Schwartz points out, when a Prime Minister's rating is low – and John Major is hardly riding on the crest of a wave right now – shares

fall in the election run-up.

Many observers feel a May-time Labour victory is already factored into prices and that a change of government will be received with barely a twitter.

But Mr Schwartz is not so sure. The five elections since the war which shifted power have been fairly close-run contests and a narrow Labour victory could unsettle the Blair spending and tax plans.

Another fascinating historical fact is that elections and bear markets go hand-in-hand.

Mr Schwartz comments: "In the second half of this century there were 10 elections either won by Labour or the Conservatives by a small

"On six of these occasions a bear market started within 100 trading days on either side of election day.

"Two other elections took place in 1974 in the midst of the worst ever bear market. One more election, in February 1950, occurred just after the bear market of 1947-49 smashed prices by 32 per cent.

"Only one of the 10 elections was not closely associated with a bear market – Heath's 1970 win. There are no guarantees for 1997, of course, but history strongly warns that poor trading conditions may soon begin."

There is no doubt interest rates will be forced higher this year; indeed fears of dearer money prompted New York's slide.

A Labour win, by whatever margin, could also encourage a run on the pound. After all Tony Blair may – or may not – have won over the City but the sight of Labour ministers strid-

ing the Westminster corridors of power may not go down well with many overseas investors.

In what could be a volatile week for the market investors will, perhaps, find the vast array of company results providing a rewarding distraction.

Guinness, Kingfisher, Pearson and Wolsey top the list. The drinks group is expected to roll out another that set of figures with NatWest Securities going for £950m, up from £940m. The trading statement could, however, offer a wee dram of encouragement.

Kingfisher is expected to achieve a jump from £237.2m to £380m and Wolsey to move modestly from £111m to £121.8m.

Among others reporting are Argos, which has just lost its Footsie status, and English China Clays. The catalogue stores chain should manage £140m against £124.4m and ECC is expected to suffer a fall from £96m to £57m and cut the dividend: 16.7p was paid last year.

Share spotlight									
Share price report									
Companies									
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# business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171-293 2636 fax 0171-293 2098  
BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

## Buffett warns that Wall Street may be heading for a fall

Jeremy Warner

Warren Buffett, the American investment guru, has added his voice to the growing number of pundits warning that stock prices in the US are too high.

In a letter to shareholders in Berkshire Hathaway, Mr Buffett's publicly quoted investment company, he says that the risk of "overpayment" surfaces periodically and, in our opinion, may now be quite

high for purchasers of virtually all stocks".

Included in this perception are Mr Buffett's so-called "inevitable", the companies he has identified as ones that will inevitably succeed over the next 10 years because of their domination of the markets in which they operate.

"Investors making purchases in an overheated market need to recognise that it may often take an extended period for the value of even an out-

standing company to catch up with the price they paid," warns the second-wealthiest man in the world.

He also puts investors in Berkshire Hathaway on notice that the 24 per cent annual compound growth rate they have seen over the past 32 years is unlikely to be maintained.

"Our past rates of growth cannot be matched nor even approached: Berkshire's equity capital is now large – in fact, fewer than 10 business in America have capital larger – and an

abundance of funds tends to dampen returns," he explains.

"Whatever our rate of progress, it will not be smooth ... for it will be influenced in a major way by fluctuations in securities markets."

Mr Buffett's annual statement is always keenly awaited by financial markets, both for news of the companies he is targeting, and for its down-to-earth but carefully considered analysis of investment issues.

The guru's large and committed

following will not be disappointed by this latest offering, which is written in characteristically light-hearted, idiosyncratic and self-effacing manner and for the first time is published on the Internet.

"Though it was a close decision, Charlie Munger [vice-president] and I have decided to enter the 20th century and accordingly we are going to put future quarterly and annual reports of Berkshire on the Internet." Mr Buffett wryly remarks.

The company's corporate jet, the Indefensible, gets a prominent mention, if only to demonstrate that after a year in which net worth rose 36 per cent, or \$6.2bn, corporate costs remain far below those of most investment houses.

"Our after-tax headquarters expense amounts to less than two basis points (one fifth of 1 per cent) measured against net worth. Even so Charlie Munger used to think this expense ratio outrageously high, blam-

ing it on my use of Berkshire's corporate jet, the Indefensible," Mr Buffett muses.

"But Charlie has recently experienced a counter-revolution: with our purchase of FlightSafety, whose major activity is the training of corporate pilots, he now rhapsodises at the mere mention of jets."

Shareholders are again invited to join Mr Buffett after the annual meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, at his favourite steak house, Gorat's.

## World-wide surge in state sell-offs to bring in \$100bn

Yvette Cooper

World-wide privatisation receipts could reach an all-time high of \$100bn this year, according to a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development released today.

The report says that a global surge in sale of state assets is having a profound effect on capital markets, particularly equity markets. "Due to its high profile, privatisation may facilitate a switch from investment in bonds to investments in equities."

However, in a separate analysis in the same publication, the OECD warns that new investors in equity markets who have

little experience of shares could be "driving equity prices up to unsustainable levels".

Just as the British privatisation programme has ebbed, selling off state assets has become a global phenomenon. The OECD research, published in the March issue of *Financial Market Trends*, reveals that over the past six years the UK has run up higher privatisation receipts than any other country, a total of \$58.5bn, with a further \$3.5bn expected in 1997. France has raised \$26.8bn in the last six years, and Australia \$24.9bn.

The largest single privatisation offering ever took place in 1996, the sale of the first part of Deutsche Telekom, the German

telecommunications company, raised DM20.1bn (\$13.3bn).

The report says: "Partly as a consequence of large-scale privatisations, domestic equity markets are developing rapidly in non-OECD countries, becoming deeper and more liquid. At the same time institutional investors in many OECD countries, where bond markets have traditionally played the main role, are slowly becoming more interested in equities."

The report says that although privatisation offerings constitute a small fraction of equity market capitalisations, high-profile privatisations can act as a catalyst for equity issues. "It is quite likely that privatisation issues have helped

pave the way – along with rallying stock markets – for the rise in private equity issues."

The OECD maintains that as government budget deficits are declining, limiting the supply of new bond issues, investment will need to switch from bonds to equities. At the same time, it says that the reform of pension provision in OECD countries will require well-functioning capital markets. "In this context, privatisations may be an important element in reinforcing equity markets."

The OECD warns against new and inexperienced investors driving equity prices to an unsustainable level. It says new investors in equity markets may

mistakenly believe that equities always outperform fixed-income investment.

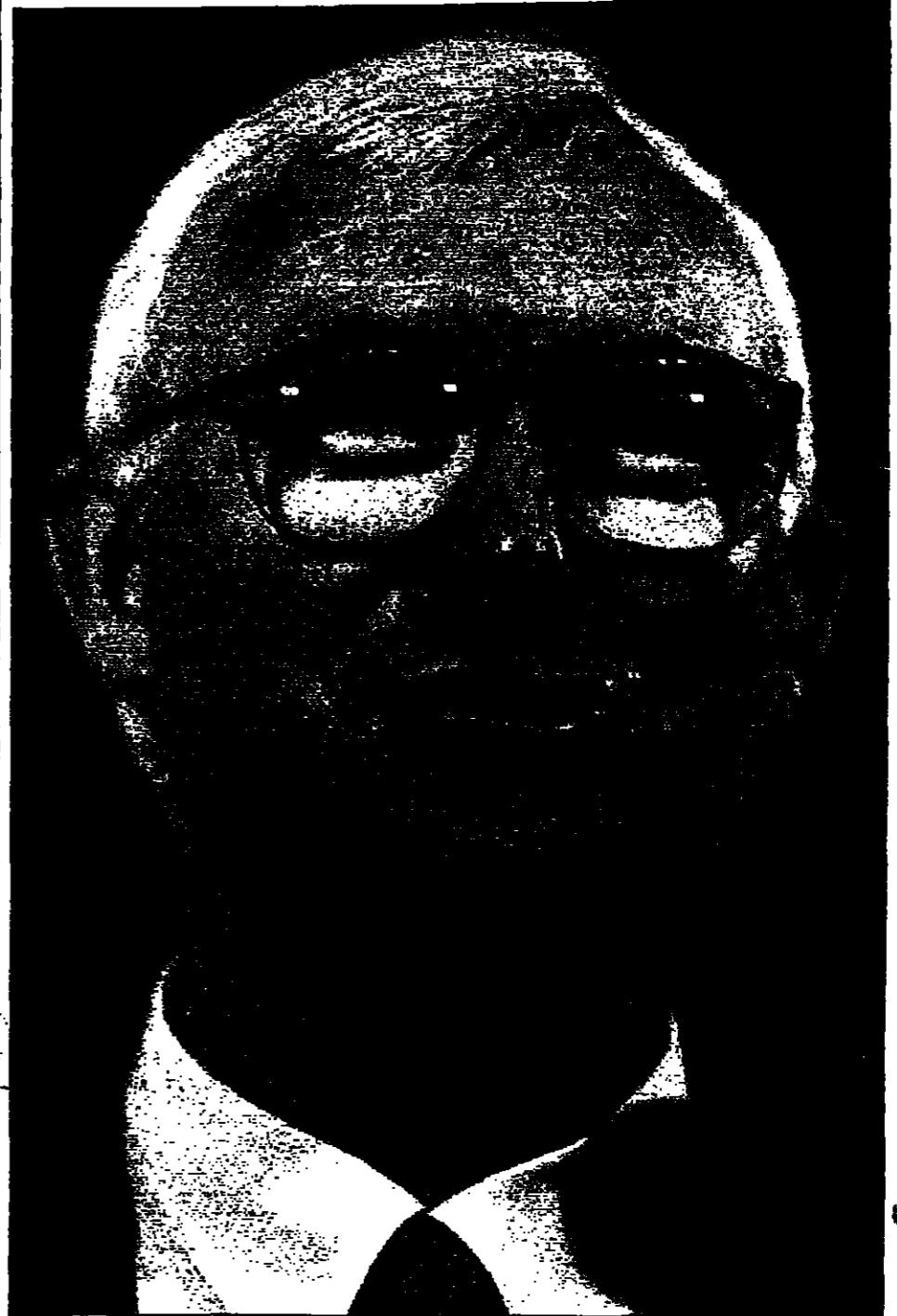
Such activity "runs the risk of out-running equity supply and thereby driving equity prices to unsustainable levels. Thus as stock markets test their current high levels, it will be important for both market participants and officials to be vigilant in view of the risk of speculative excesses."

Meanwhile the OECD says the flow of privatisations is unlikely to ebb. Portugal and Spain continue to pursue vast privatisation programmes.

Part of the Portuguese telecommunications company was sold last year, whilst Spain sold 20 per cent of Telefonica, its telecoms company, at the beginning of this year. The telecoms sector is likely to continue to dominate privatisation next year, as France, Australia and Italy have sales in the pipeline.

So far the emerging markets in eastern Europe have not had a big impact on global privatisation receipts. Hungary has clocked up the highest figure so far, raising \$6.7bn between 1990 and 1996, with a further \$1bn expected this year. Poland has raised \$4bn, with \$3.5bn on the cards for 1997.

City believes Birt could be sitting on a gold mine



Key strategy: John Birt believes the move could produce £500m over the next 10 years

### IN BRIEF

MEPC, the property company, is expected to announce shortly the appointment of James Dundas as finance director, filling a vacancy left by the departure of Jim Beveridge last month. Mr Dundas is a former director of Morgan Grenfell and until recently was the finance director of the Airport Authority in Hong Kong.

The Quantum Fund, the main investment vehicle of George Soros, has accumulated a 3 per cent shareholding in Capital Corporation, the London casino operator attempting to fight off a £178m takeover bid from London Clubs International. Most of the buying is thought to have taken place after London Clubs launched its bid and much of it would have been at prices significantly above the offer of 178p a share. Dealers believe there is a high possibility of a rival offer. Capital Corporation is this week expected to issue its formal defence document.

Bernie Ecclestone, head of Formula One, the motor racing group, is reported as being unsure that he wants to proceed with the flotation of his company. If the price is right – more than £2bn – then he might want to go ahead but equally there might be merit in waiting for the revenue stream from pay-television to come through. He is reported as saying.

Migros, the Swiss retailing and manufacturing conglomerate is planning to enter the British market with a series of own-label products to offer supermarket groups. With 24 per cent of the domestic Swiss food market, Migros has already penetrated the French and Dutch markets as own-label suppliers to grocery retailers. Migros plans to target the main UK supermarkets to offer them supplies in 50 core lines, including bakery products, savoury snacks, washing powder, pasta and mineral water.

Wates Leisure is to expand its health and leisure clubs to the tune of £30m. The UK health and fitness club operator owns eight Pinnacle clubs in the south of England, with operating profits of £1m. Funds of £20m will be provided by a syndicate led by Phoenix Fund Managers, so Wates can develop additional clubs and complete developments in Bromley, Newbury and Surbiton.

Britain's relative economic decline has slowed, according to a report from the Social Market Foundation. Author Nick Crafts writes: "Despite continuing worries about innovation and skills, improved industrial relations, a better quality of investment and trends in productivity growth suggest that there may have been a relative improvement sufficient to prevent further economic decline relative to Europe." The report blames weak productivity performance, and a weak capacity for innovation and for making effective use of technological change for Britain's relative economic decline in the post-war years. It says that economic reforms pursued since 1979 have had some pay-off in terms of growth, but that they have also increased income inequality. (Britain's Relative Economic Decline 1870-1995. The Social Market Foundation, 21 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1)

## German progress to EMU under spotlight

Yvette Cooper

Germany's progress towards the Maastricht criteria will be discussed by European finance ministers in Brussels today, amid persistent speculation that German economic problems will cause EMU to be delayed.

The German finance ministry denied claims in the German press at the weekend that secret government calculations place the deficit this year at 4.15 per cent. This is considerably higher than the 3 per cent Maastricht target and the official forecast of 2.9 per cent that finance minister Theo Waigel set before his colleagues today at the Ecofin meeting.

Mr Waigel will present the German "convergence plan" which shows government borrowing in 1997 at 2.9 per cent of GDP, debt at 61.5 per cent of GDP, inflation at 1.5 per cent and interest rates at 6.5 per cent.

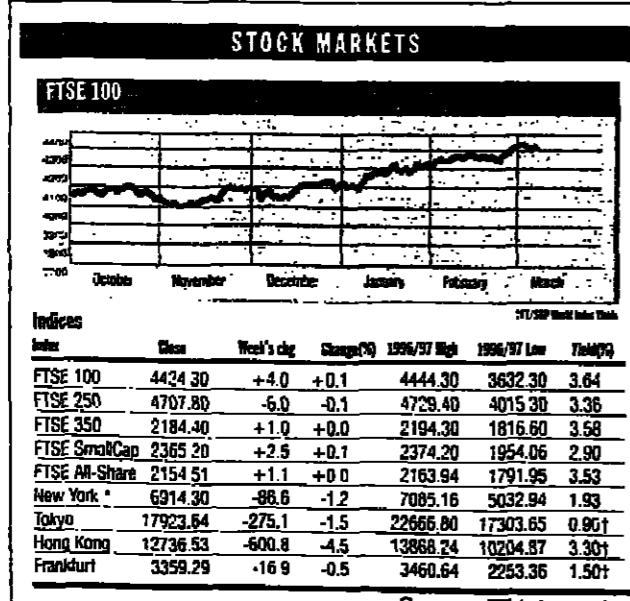
The French government is also due to present its convergence plan to the Ecofin meeting. But in recent months the French economy has received less attention than its German neighbour, as most economists believe France will find it less difficult than Germany to meet the Maastricht criteria.

Klaus Kinkel, the German foreign minister, said yesterday from an informal meeting of European foreign ministers in Aeldehorn: "I think we have reached the point of no return on the way to the euro. Not getting there would be a blow to Europe."



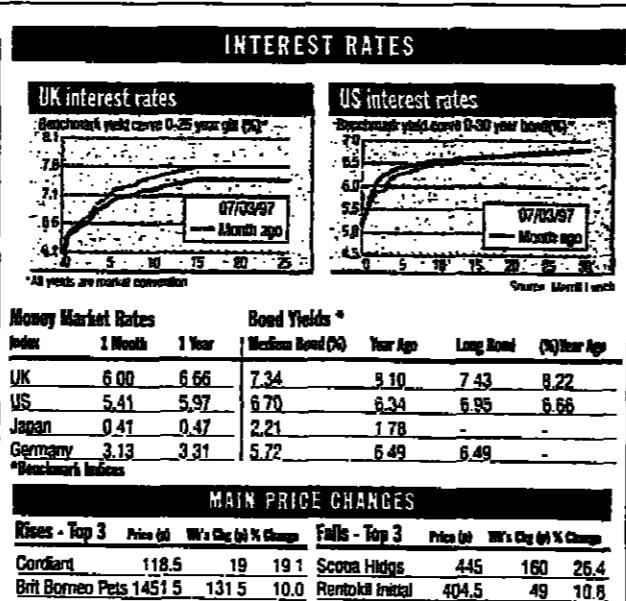
Theo Waigel: seeking to reassure finance ministers

### STOCK MARKETS



Source: FT Information

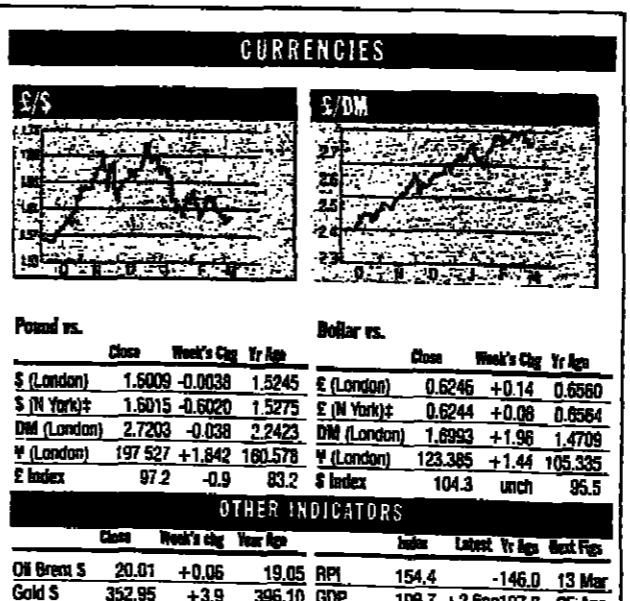
### INTEREST RATES



### MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Indices	Price	Wk Chg	% Chg	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	7 Day Chg
FTSE 100	4424.30	+4.0	+0.1	4444.30	3632.30	3.64
FTSE 250	4707.80	-5.0	-0.1	4729.40	4015.30	3.36
FTSE 350	2184.40	+1.0	+0.0	2194.30	1816.60	3.58
FTSE SmallCap	2365.20	+2.5	+0.1	2374.20	1954.06	2.90
FTSE All-Share	2154.51	+1.1	+0.0	2163.90	1791.95	3.53
New York	6914.30	-68.6	-1.2	7095.16	5032.94	1.93
Tokyo	17923.54	-275.1	-1.5	22665.80	17303.65	0.901
Hong Kong	12736.53	-600.8	-4.5	13868.24	10204.97	3.301
Frankfurt	3359.29	-16.9	-0.5	3460.64	2233.36	1.501

### CURRENCIES



### OTHER INDICATORS

Index	Latest	Wk Chg	Yr Ago
Oil Brent	20.01	+0.05	19.95
Gold \$	352.95	+3.9	356.70
Gold £	220.47	+2.96	258.82

### Non-execs bolster Gallaher board

American Brands has moved to

bolster the board of its soon to be demerged UK tobacco company, Gallaher, with the appointment of five non-executives drawn mainly from the ranks of British industry.

The demerger will involve a simple share split. However, American Brands wants Gallaher to be listed on the London Stock Exchange as well as in New York. Over time Gallaher is expected to become more of a British institutional stock than an American one.

Peter Wilson, Gallaher's chairman, said the new non-executives would complement the existing executive directors.

Hedges, Silk Cut and Old Gold, is to be demerged from its American parent later this year after satisfactory rulings from the US tax authorities and stockholder approvals.

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# back page: the week starts here

## IN THE INDEPENDENT THIS WEEK



### THURSDAY And the winner is...

### Oscar form guide

### FRIDAY Mansun

We can't  
keep  
singing  
about love  
for the next  
40 years

### THURSDAY Education+

Our special  
section  
about  
schools and  
universities

Rich with  
appointments  
advertisements

### Skywalking stars

**Film:** It's the regal thing – the royal gala showing of *Star Wars* has the Prince of Wales in attendance. Witness the return of the Jedi at the special charity pre-screening of the digitally remastered film on Thursday at the Odeon, Leicester Square. Director George Lucas and Mark "Luke Skywalker" Hamill will be there. Tickets £75-£175. 0171-543 1234. The film opens to the public on Friday.

### Hot stuff

**Theatre:** You may or not be tempted by the cast – Ian Reddington, "Tricky Dickie" from *EastEnders*, Denise Black from *Coronation Street* – at the Nottingham Playhouse from tonight. The publicity calls it "mouthwatering".

Whatever, Debbie Isitt is a very good playwright and *The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband* is a very good, interesting play. With a mixture of sex, death, food and Elvis Presley, you have it all. Until 29 March. 7.30pm. Tickets £4.75-£14. 0115-947 0882

### Orders order

**Talk:** Graham Swift will speak on the work to succeed his Booker Prize winning *Last Orders* (Macmillan paperback, £5.99) on Friday at the NFT's Lyttelton Theatre and follow that with a question and answer session in which one of the questions may well be about allegations concerning the intimate relationship of *Last Orders* with Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. 6.30pm. Tickets £3.50 (£2.50 concs). 0171-928 2252.

### Bowed over

**Book:** Tibor Fischer's new novel *The Collector* Collector has been called the "best novel ever narrated by a bow". A work which indeed is not up to the standards of his previous *The Thought Gang*, but still impressive, despite that rather unpromising narrative device. On a par with his first, *Under the Frog*, short-listed for the Booker Prize in '93. Out today. £12.99, Secker & Warburg.

### Grosz first

**Visual Arts:** A major artistic witness to social injustices in Berlin between the wars and a prominent figure in the Dada movement, the draughtsman and political cartoonist George Grosz is the subject of an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts from 20 March. It will be the first display of his work in the UK since 1962. Works include drawings and watercolours of prostitutes, scheming politicians and beggars from the Weimar Republic. Tickets £5 (£1-£3.50 concs). 0171-494 5676.

### Denise Black:



Denise Black:  
mouthwatering

(estimate £200,000), the only guitar ever to be signed by all the Fab Four (estimate £80,000-£100,000) and the terrace house where Ringo Starr was born for about £5,000-£10,000. Bonhams: 0171-393 3900.

### Head start

**Sport:** For real Boat Race aficionados ... it's the Head of the River on the Thames this Saturday. There aren't many better sights than 420 boats winding their way en masse down the river. The Olympic heroes Matthew Pinsent and Steven Redgrave "star".

### Dangerous liaisons

**Conference:** At tomorrow afternoon's One World Conference, leading journalists, captains of industry, politicians and human rights representatives will be discussing whether (and, if yes, how) companies and media corporations should do business in countries whose governments are accused of political repression. May Fair Inter-Continental Hotel, London, 18 March, 2-5.30pm. Fee £48 (£32 concs). Details: 0171-312 0034.

### New dance

**Dance:** Either "the most exciting dance group in the world" or an "appalling way to spend public funds". Our critic says: "For courage and mastery, DV8 is unmatched." The dance group DV8 starts a tour on Wednesday, Cambridge Arts Theatre, 01223 503333. Tickets £9-£14. Ends 3 August, QEH, London.

**Research:**  
James Aufenast,  
Cornelius Grupen.

### WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO SEE, WHAT TO DO

#### Your witness

**Television:** The hard-hitting *Witness* series returns on Tuesday with six parts. Beginning with child abuse, it also tackles babies born in prison, a "Dr Death" who encourages suicide and Britain's most radical Muslims. C4 9-10pm. Strong stuff, and just the tonic for the usual Tuesday night fare.

#### Here's the craic

**St Patrick's Day:** For Irish beer, cheer, food, and music head for the Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool tonight. Catch Mary Couglin, a singer with something of a voice and a reputation in Ireland. Tickets £10-£11. 0151-705 3789.

#### Hard day's sell

**Auction:** "Beatles for Sale" is at the Tokyo Auction House, Japan, on Saturday, with a satellite link to London and broadcast on the Auction Channel, which should allow virtual bidding from virtually anywhere. Items include the barbershop immortalised in "Penny Lane".

(estimate £200,000), the

only guitar ever to be signed by all the Fab Four (estimate £80,000-£100,000) and the terrace house where Ringo Starr was born for about £5,000-£10,000. Bonhams: 0171-393 3900.

#### Masterly Meistersinger

**Opera:** Bernard Haitink conducts the long-awaited revival of Graham Vick's masterly production of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* (above) at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden on Friday 21 and Monday 24 March. Tickets £7-£147.50. Edward Seckerson's review, page 12

#### Last chance

**Theatre:** *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* finishes at the Aldwych on Saturday. Superb performances by David Suchet and Lloyd Owen. 7.15pm. Tickets £7.50-£25. 0171-416 6003.

**Opera:** Jonathan Miller's Armani-clad production of *Cosi Fan Tutte* at the Royal Opera House ends on Wednesday. Cast includes Melanie Diener and William Dazeley, Les M Jones and Timothy Robinson as the lovers. David Wilson-Johnson is Don Alfonso. 7pm. Tickets £4-£90.

**Edward Seckerson's review, page 12**



**I**t is about now that MPs with small chances of being returned to the Commons start looking to see whether there might not be jobs around Westminster more secure than endorsement by the fickle electorate.

The trouble is percentages are very strict, clerical work demands more skill than most MPs possess, working in the library requires qualifications outwith their ability, while the Sergeant-at-Arms recruits from only the Armed Forces. Ian Green has stopped operations, the catering department is considered a step down as would be office cleaning. This last service is contracted out to someone like David Evans, like being the MP for Luton, there is no job security.

"Hope you come back, sir," say the barmen, the women who rearrange the dust in your office, the police at Members entrance and the waitress at your table in the restaurant; there is no cross-party eating at Westminster. Realistic MPs go round shaking hands with those who made life easier over the last five years; there is also much toing and froing at the Fees Office where they work out redundancy packages, pensions and explain that you are paid for three months after losing your seat in order "to finish off outstanding casework".

You would have to be a saint – perhaps Frank Field MP – to spend May, June and July dictating letters in respect of former constituents' requests for repairs to broken sash-cards.

**"D**ear racing enthusiast" is an open line that fills me with apprehension. Last Thursday's communication for Alderley Edge in Cheshire came from a man who, after copious research, suddenly realised that he was sitting on a goldmine. "I was making huge profits from backing horses that were always on the job, running for their lives, well handicapped and starting at ridiculously long prices." So sure was he of having found the formula that would change his life, he gave up his well-paid job.

Hence the letter: If I undertake not to divulge his formula, only bet on the horses "off" course, spread bets among many bookmakers and send him £955, I will learn all by registered post. You cannot help wondering why a man sitting on a goldmine goes to such lengths. Hence the letter: If I undertake not to divulge his formula, only bet on the horses "off" course, spread bets among many bookmakers and send him £955, I will learn all by registered post. You cannot help wondering why a man sitting on a goldmine goes to such lengths.

**S**o there is an Auction Channel (see left); it cannot be long before picture framing, ouija boarding and hedgehogs get their own channels. Still no news about my application for a non-smoking channel, though there are now computers which can erase specific items – like cigarettes – from a picture.

Watching *Casablanca* after smoking material had been excised was interesting, though misunderstood by the audience who thought Bogart was trying to set fire to Ingrid Bergman when he lit her expunged cigarette.

**C**hannel 4's *Countdown*, the successful afternoon game show, runs its predictable course every weekday 4.30 to 5 pm: six nine-letter word games, two six-number arithmetic competitions in which some or all of the numbers must be used to make up a high number. There's also a conundrum and the day's pun by the host, who once had his finger bitten by a ferret on camera.

Day after day when it comes to numbers, contestants who can choose "high" or "low" ask for one high number and five low ones. Not on Friday. "Four high and any two others," said a pleasantly ordinary looking man. Carol Vorderman who controls the game sighed.

Out came the four high numbers – 25, 50, 75 and 100. Then a figure 3 and figure 6. The machine rolled the number to be achieved: 952.

The other contestants, and I and most mathematically literate people, got 953, one number away worth seven points: 3 plus 6 times 100; add 50; divide 75 by 25 and add the three. Pleasant ordinary looking man got 952.

"**M**ultiply by 75," said the man. Vorderman started getting: "Multiply 318 by 75 to broken sash-cards.

There was a pause, for she is among the many who do not know their 318 times table. A voice from the backroom, presumably a voice with a calculator intoned, "23,800".

"Take away fifty and divide by 25; answer 952," conceded the pleasant ordinary man.

Vorderman gasped, the audience gasped, I, drinking a cup of mint tea, gasped. To do this in 30 seconds is a rare achievement. Watch today's programme at 4.30 for, of course, pleasant ordinary man.

"Do you feel resentment against the thief who kept your money and things all those years?"

"I respect him, for he has seen the error of his ways and we are now good friends."

"How did you get to know each other?"

"We keep doing these TV shows and interviews about the wallet incident." Steal now, pick up the TV fees later?

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**THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD**

No. 3248. Monday 17 March

By Partha

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10		11						
12	13		14					
15		16						
17		18						
19	20	21	22	23				
24	25	26						
27	28	29	30					
31								

**ACROSS**

- Positive about joining business – it's an obsession (13)
- Choose to admit upper class guy who's rich (7)
- Magritte's sort of music (7)
- Reflecting Ireland's great lake (5)
- Curse a number in Greek (9)
- Food market, by the sound of it (4)
- One can see the point of this monument (7)
- Saw him forced to swallow cocktail that's insipid (7)
- Eccentric musical performance? (7)
- Members are divided about original local saint (7)
- Endless courage to try (4)
- Ring youth leader to arrange early game (5)
- Fever is part of colleague's illness (4)
- Refusal by one of considerable rank (7)
- Domestic quarters open out (7)
- Private room? (8,5)
- Usual way to go about being elected (7)
- In charge of deliveries (4)
- Ignore support for reduction (7)
- Do exercise right on schedule (7)
- Old garment American acquired by return (4)
- Paperwork? (7)
- Fail to obtain cipher (4,2,7)
- Perfect meat he produces for outdoor party (4,9)
- Bachelor in line to become foreign banker (5)
- Time to leave with fabric (5)
- String tied round paper isn't strong (7)
- Customers proceed to take unfair advantage (5,2)
- Health check claimed to be incorrect (7)
- Fundamental means of communication I note (7)
- Audibly stir up arguments (4)
- Can't start trashy old car (4)

**DOWN**

- Usual way to go about being elected (7)
- In charge of deliveries (4)
- Ignore support for reduction (7)
- Do exercise right on schedule (7)
- Old garment American acquired by return (4)
- Paperwork? (7)
- Fail to obtain cipher (4,2,7)
- Perfect meat he produces for outdoor party (4,9)
- Bachelor in line to become foreign banker (5)
- Time to leave with fabric (5)
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